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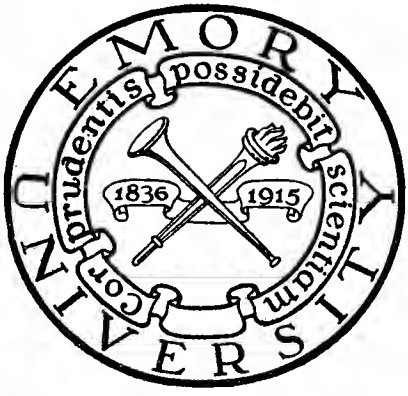

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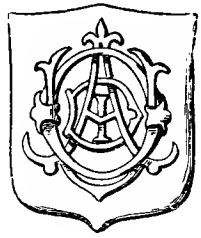
FRIENDSHIP

A STORY

BY OUIDA

AUTHOR OF 'PUCK' 'ARIADNÊ' 'SIGNA' ETC.



'Si l'emploi de la Comédie est de corriger les vices, je ne vois pas par quelle raison il y en aura de privilégiés' MOLIÈRE

IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1878

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FRIENDSHIP.

CHAPTER XIV.

'CHÈRE COMTESSE ETOILE, pardon me, but you sow the earth with dragon's teeth!' said Lady Cardiff one morning, about four o'clock, on the Pincio. 'You cannot want enemies; you really cannot *want* them—you must have so many! I don't wish to be rude, you know, but you must. Whoever shines, &c. Why will you make so many unnecessary ones? Do tell me.'

'What have I done?' said Etoile with amazement and a little absently. She was thinking of things that Ioris had said the night before in

the Palazzo Farnese, where there had been an early reception.

'Done?' echoed Lady Cardiff. 'Why, you have cut our beloved Mrs. Henry V. Clams *dead!* Unconsciously, I daresay, but still dead. You looked at her as you did it; you did really. I must say so if they ask me.'

'I did not see her,' said Etoile. 'Not that I should be unwilling to commit the crime consciously, if you mean that.'

'Good gracious! Has she offended you?'

'Not in the least; but why should I know her? She is far less educated than my maid, and very many times more vulgar.'

'Of course; but still why?'

'With a vulgarity more blatant for the fine clothes it is dressed in; a vulgarity that is not even redeemed by mere decency.'

Lady Cardiff shifted her sunshade.

'Terribly strongly you put things; of course they sound horrible when you put them like that. But everybody knows her. It's a way we've got into nowadays. Why don't you write a comedy like *l'Etrangère* or the *Famille Benoiton*, and

put all that into it? We should applaud it on the stage; but it only sounds uncomfortable off; —you dont mind my saying what I think?'

'Pray always say what you think. Would you continue to know Mrs. Henry V. Clams if her husband were ruined to-morrow?'

'Goodness me! of course not; and she would never expect it—never. She does know her place. There is nothing like a free and independent citizen for taking slights good-temperedly. I never knew *how* much kicking a human being would stand until I knew these born-democrats. One didn't know them twenty years ago. I don't know why we didn't. They hadn't struck oil, I suppose, and made it worth our while; or Worth hadn't dressed them, and they were still mere natural tar and feathers. Somehow we didn't know them. Perhaps they hadn't come over to "Eurōpe." Know her if she were ruined? The idea! You might as well ask would Fontebranda continue to *filer le parfait amour*.'

'Poor woman!' said Etoile.

'You needn't pity her, my dear. You may be quite sure she knows quite well the terms

on which she has my visits and his devotion. If all the "red cents" went to-morrow I daresay she'd go back across the water and "keep a bar" very happily. The days of strong objections and strong emotions are alike over, believe me. As for you, you are exactly like Molière's Misanthrope; I shall call you Alceste—

> 'Etre franc et sincère est mon plus grand talent,
> Je ne sais point jouer les hommes en parlant,
> Et qui n'a pas le don de cacher ce qu'il pense,
> Doit faire en ce pays fort peu de résidence.

Dear me! why will people go on writing? As if Molière and Fielding between them hadn't said all that there is to be said better than anyone else ever can say it! By the bye, why wouldn't you go to the Echéance ball?'

'I dislike balls.'

'Very well; if you dislike dancing, don't dance; though if a woman don't, you know, they always think she has got a short leg, or a cork leg, or something or other that's dreadful. But why not show yourself at them? At least show yourself. One goes to balls as one goes to church. It's a social muster, and not to be

there looks odd. I wish you had gone. Our dear Joan was in great force there; her Io behind her chair at supper, and she sending him about here, there, and everywhere to do this, that, and the other. "Io, hand that mayonnaise." "Io, take Lady Cardiff that chicken." "Io, reach me those strawberries." You should have heard her! I grinned and everybody grinned;—except that admirable wooden husband. She'd got a fine set of sapphires on, and told five different histories in my hearing of how she did get 'em. Do you happen to know where she did? "Io" does, I suppose. She wanted us all to take shares in some Society for the Diffusion of Rabbits over the Campagna. It seems there are no rabbits in Italy. I never noticed it, did you? And we're all to repair this omission of Nature and make a fortune out of their tails (I think it's their tails); and there is no risk whatever, she says it's to be all pure profit. Clever creature! She really is great fun. Half her life is spent in being so dreadfully afraid people should think she has a lover, and the other half is spent in

being so dreadfully afraid people should think she *hasn't!* I left her at the ball, and I didn't come away till five. Poor "Io" looked very much bored, I thought. What a very queer thing love is!'

Etoile was silent. She was thinking of him, as he had been at the Palazzo Farnese earlier in the same evening. She felt angered—unreasonably angered that he had gone later to this ball.

'Not that it's hardly ever more than the mere question of a *quid pro quo*,' continued Lady Cardiff, looking up into the pink dome of her point-lace parasol; 'a give-and-take partnership of vanity and convenience. Throw in with the selfishness of this vanity, the mere animal selfishness of the senses, and weld them with the adhering force of habit, and you have the only form of love that is known to nine-tenths of our men and women. Passion is a dead letter to them. It would scare them out of their lives. They know no more of it than they do of God, and think no more of it than they do of their graves. Modern love

is like modern furniture, very showy and sold at a long price, but all veneer. Pray, how is your friend with the *grande passion* that sends its object to the frosty Caucasus? I saw in yesterday's *Galignani* that Fédor Souroff had been badly wounded in some mountain skirmish. Is that true? Yes? Dear me! Now, if he had only taken a fancy to Mrs. Henry V. Clams or our dear Joan, nothing of that would have happened to him. It's a caution, as Mrs. Henry would say. Ah, there's General Desart and Mrs. Desart, *and* Buonretiro. Pretty woman still, ain't she? Been flirting fifteen years straight through, and as "fit" now as ever she was. They are two of the pillars of the Casa Challoner. General Desart believes in Mr. Challoner as one man of honour believes in another. There's nothing so charming as the amiability of any unamiable people when they occupy the same position, and that a ticklish one. "Ca' me and I'll ca' thee," is ever present in their minds. General Desart declares he is ready to put his hand in the fire if Ioris is anything he oughtn't to be, &c., &c.; and Mr. Challoner is ready to put

his hand in the fire if Buonretiro is anything *he* oughtn't to be, &c., &c. Beautiful reciprocity of faith! Ah, my dear General, how do? Lovely weather, isn't it? Charlie gone back to Eton? Handsome boy. How do, dear? How well you look! You miss Charlie? To be sure, to be sure. One always misses schoolboys, if only by the preternatural stillness of the house when they're gone. Shall I see you at the Japanese Embassy to-night?'

With a few pleasant words Lady Cardiff bade the Desarts adieu, and sailed on under the palm that once saw Augustan Rome.

By the toy-kiosque, they met again Mrs. Henry V. Clams and the Marquis Fontebranda; reaching the summer-house, they encountered the great Duchess of Bridgewater, with her shadow, Lord Dauntless, who were on the eve of hastening home, one to the Court, and the other to the Commons; by the water-clock they saw that leader of fashion the Baroness de Bruges, with young Ferrara, who had a face like the Dolce Christ, and was twenty years her junior; feeding the swans was lively Lady Eyebright, who

cheated at cards and had her ears boxed, but was highly esteemed nevertheless, because she was believed to have compromised herself with a very high personage, and to have heaps of his letters, very ill spelt. Nearer the wall, looking at the sunset and her neighbours' gowns alternately, was Princess Gregarine, whom men called 'Les vices sympathiques'; ugly as a Kaffir, charming as a syren, who called herself the best dressed gorilla in Europe, and whose caprices ranged from Grand Dukes to Corporals of the Guard, and, except for superiority of plunder, preferred the latter.

'Delightful age we live in,' said Lady Cardiff, when she had nodded to them all, and stopped for her last chat, and was going towards her carriage. 'Such dear, virtuous women all these are, and so funny it is to see them where Messalina used to make an idiot of herself with Silius! Poor Messalina! She was but a primitive creature, and knew no better than to exhibit herself in the streets; and Claudius was an easy husband, and uxorious. Yet he did cut up rough at last; Mr. Challoner and General Desart, Bridgewater and Gregarine, never will. It has

been reserved for the Christian world, which boasts of its one wife to one man, to produce a polygamy and polyandry side by side in its midst like the lion and the lamb in Revelations. We've drawing-room editions of everything—we should have had one of the Bible and Shakespeare, only that nobody ever reads them,—and so we have drawing-room editions of illicit love, a pretty thing that we can ask to dinner, nod to in church, and meet at court balls. Dear me! poor Messalina was a *very* primitive creature, and must have had a sort of conscience in her after all. We've none.'

As the carriage passed outward, and went under the clipped ilex trees of the Villa Medici in the rosy light of the passing day, under the trees they saw the Lady Joan and Ioris.

Lady Joan kissed her hand with a bright and cordial smile.

Ioris, as he bowed, coloured and then grew very pale.

Lady Cardiff smiled as she said: 'Are they going up? They'll join the Desarts, I daresay; quite seasonable. The Duchess and the Gregarine

are a flight above her; even little Eyebright, I think, don't favour her much. Little Eyebright's no fool, though she does lose her pin-money for a year in five seconds at Draw-Poker. What a charming game, and what a charming name—Draw-Poker! It is such an epitome of our times, isn't it? All the cards "chucked," and the game to the one that "grabs" quickest. When the world had good manners it played Ecarté and Piquet; now it has no manners at all, it plays Poker. It's curious that we should have no manners, but it is true. Heavens! to think of the old *grandes dames* I remember in my babyhood—friends of the Lamballe and the Polignac, sitters to Lawrence and poems for Praed! Where has it all gone—the serene grace, the grand courtesy, the perfect delicacy of sentiment and of phrase, the true consciousness of *noblesse oblige*? It has gone like the old sweet fragrant scent of the dried rose-leaves in the rooms. Nobody has dried rose-leaves now. They have *brûle-parfums* instead, and the perfumes are as loud as their dress and their speech.'

Lady Cardiff sighed as she drew up the carriage-skin closer.

'I took a pretty woman yesterday (a great lady, too, as place goes) to see Vassiltchikoff's new house. The house is lovely, and has worlds of pretty things; he's a great collector. "*Comme vous êtes bien installé ici*," she said to him. "*Il faut que j'y pince quelque chose*," and she carried off one of his best bits of Saxe, and an enamelled sweetmeat box of Petitôt's. And she'd only seen him twice before.

'*Pince!*' The language of the gutter, and with the language the manners, and with the manners the morals: of course!—inevitable and perpetual conjunction.

'But, my dear, the supreme feminine passion of the day is the bourgeois passion of thrift! In face of all our lawless expenditure and idiotic profusion! Yes. In face of all that. Perhaps because of all that. Women seldom spend their *own* money. Ask Dauntless, Ioris, Buonretiro, or Hélène Gregarine's Grand Dukes. It is expensive work to be Madame's "friend" nowadays. Thrift is the fashionable woman's master-motive—

it's only a means to an end; she gets that she may squander. She is the miser and the heir in one person. She seldom wears a dress three times, it's true, and never heeds the loss of one; but that is a matter of vanity and rivalry. To make up for it, she insures her chemises, underpays her governesses, sells her wardrobe when she has to go into mourning, borrows from her friends, and plunders from her lovers. In all her romances she keeps a weather eye open to what will pay; and when she is insisting on a separation, never adores Don Juan so much but what she keeps hold of her money if she can. That most poetic and transparent soul, Princess Milianoff, wore mourning here all carnival, because her lover was sent out of the country; ruined her family by her headstrong passion; told Milianoff flat to his face that she loathed him and everything belonging to him, and adored Stornellino, and meant to live with him at all costs; but all the same she stipulated that she should have all the Milianoff's jewels, and even asked for the twelve footmen's liveries, and all their silk stockings. Impossible, you say? No; a fact, my dear. A

plain, hard, absolute fact. The lawyers heard her. People who say "Impossible" don't know our world; that's all. She was mad about Stornellino, but all the same she thought she might as well plunder while she could from her husband. The women of our day don't perceive when they drop to bathos. They make absurd anti-climaxes, and never see the ridicule of them. Madame Milianoff was superb in her wrath and her beauty, deaf to her sister's prayers, blind to her father's tears, adamant to her husband's upbraiding, declaring by all the powers that were that she loathed even her child because her child was also his. It was a scene of Medea, of Phèdre, of Lucrezia—but all the same she fought for every one of her diamonds, and remembered the footmen's silk stockings. Now, if there were a living Beaumarchais to put that on the stage, who'd believe it? And yet it is a fact, I tell you. A fact as hard as a pebble. All thrift, my dear; all thrift. That is why there is no passion in our day. They have sensual fancies like rockets, that make a great rush and blaze for a second, but they are always fastened to a gold stick of solid bullion, and when the rocket

evaporates in the air, the stick comes down to the ground,—and they keep it. When the woman of our day publishes her "*Souvenirs de mes Tendresses*," she need only edit her banker's book—with a key and an explanatory note or two. "*A la place du cœur elle n'a qu'une lettre de change.*" If the quotation is not textually correct, it ought to be; it would have been if Hugo had known as much of our world as he does of little Jeanne. By-the-way, Joan Challoner will get that royal subsidy, they say, out of the ministers for her Messina Bridge, to prop it up a little while. I daresay that's why she looks so smiling to-day.

'Ah! all her efforts seem very puny and petty to you, no doubt; but, in point of fact, those efforts mean very much. They mean perpetual humiliation, constant self-restraint, continual strain, incessant vigilance. Only fancy what it must be to that fiery-hearted violent creature to choke down her temper, to control her scorn, to hide her passion, to veil her disdain; perpetually to stoop and eat dust in the sight of everybody, and bring her tameless tongue to utter all the

humble pie of commonplace and compliment! What a purgatory it must be, you say? N—no; hardly that. A continual effort certainly, but she is sustained in it by her anxiety to succeed; and, after all, very likely she feels the fun of the whole thing, and grins all day behind her mask.

'It is nothing new, all this; though you fume about it now, as Alceste fumed and fretted in his time. Society always had its fixed demands. It used to exact birth. It used to exact manners. In a remote and golden age there is a tradition that it was once contented with mind. Nowadays it exacts money, or rather amusement, because if you don't let other folks have the benefit of your money, Society will take no account of it. But have money and spend it well (that is, let Society live on it, gorge with it, walk ankle deep in it), and you may be anything and do anything; you may have been an omnibus conductor in the Strand, and you may marry a duke's daughter. You may have been an oyster girl in New York, and you may entertain royalties. It is impossible to exaggerate an age

of anomaly and hyperbole. There never was an age when people were so voracious of amusement, and so tired of it, both in one. It is a perpetual carnival and a permanent yawn. If you can do anything to amuse us you are safe—till we get used to you—and then you amuse us no longer, and must go to the wall. Every age has its price: what Walpole said of men must be true of mankind. Anybody can buy the present age that will bid very high and pay with tact as well as bullion. There is nothing it will not pardon if it see its way to getting a new sensation out of its leniency. Perhaps no one ought to complain. A society with an india-rubber conscience, no memory, and an absolute indifference to eating its own words and making itself ridiculous, is, after all, a convenient one to live in—if you can pay for its suffrages. Panshanger Pomfret married out of his own rank the other day. We were horrified. We were outraged. We had no words to express our sense of the infamy that gave a great man and seventy-five thousand a year to a woman whom nobody knew. We found out all about her in a

month, that she had been on the boards of fifth-rate theatres, that she had sung in music halls and danced in tights, that she had been to chimney-sweeps' balls, that she had cooked sausages and sold gin-sling; that she had hired a fictitious mother out from an unmentionable place in New York; in short, that there was nothing that she hadn't done, and we ran a neck-and-neck race as to who should know the last newest and vilest story about her. Well, Pan Pomfret took the bull by the horns, and gilded the horns. (They seldom prick *then*, my dear.) London, and Paris, and Italy were dazzled by his wealth and summoned to his entertainments. He got his cousin to present her at Court, and his sister to receive her; and down the throat of the rest of the world forced her like a very big golden pill. *Il connaît son monde*, my dear. *Luxe* in London, *luxe* in Paris; *luxe* in Rome; and Society bidden to enjoy it; and above all, *luxe* with tact like minever on white satin. Nothing resists the two —nothing. They make a sovereign's robes, in which a beggar will look regal. It is only a year since he married her, but there is nothing

on earth more successful than Panshanger Pomfret's wife. Sung in music halls! Danced in tights! Heavens! my dear, we would all swear till we were black in the face that the public never saw so much even as the very tip of her nose. She did sing in private concerts, in Park Lane and Portman Square, and, we think, *once* at Buckingham Palace. But anything else, my dear! anything else! why we never heard of such slander—never! We see, hear, and feel her only through a golden shower, as Danaë saw, heard, and felt Jupiter; and what a difference it makes in our sentiments! Mr. Challoner's wife can't be Panshanger Pomfret's, but in her little way she goes on the same principle. The Pomfrets go in for treble events at four figures, and the Challoners for selling-races and shilling sweepstakes, but the principle is the same; the only principle, indeed, that will ever succeed nowadays.'

'Believe me, Society is a plant that must be fed and watered, and dug and matted scrupulously,' continued Lady Cardiff gravely, as they rolled homeward through the sunset lightened streets.

'If you do not take endless trouble with it, it will never blossom for you. Are there not dukes and duchesses nearly as obscure as Jones and Brown? Are there not millionaires, ay billionaires for that matter, who live hidden under their gold as utterly as if it were a dust heap? Why do you see a marchioness a nonentity whose name is barely known off her estates, and a new comer, who has nothing but her shrewd sense and her pleasant manner, pushed up into a leader of fashion? It's all a matter of trouble and tact, my dear; nothing more. It isn't what you have, but how you spend it. It isn't what you are, but what you appear to be. It isn't rank, or brains, or riches, or conduct; you have any one of them, or you may have them all, and yet may avail you nothing. You may remain obscure. Look at Lady Kencarrow in London now—not pretty, not clever, not witty, a third-rate actress in the country, as anybody knows, and yet what a success! Princes of the blood go to dine with her, her house is the very temple of distinction. All a matter of tact, my dear, and of attention. She has devoted her life to getting

a Position. She has succeeded. Nothing succeeds like success. You people who are very clever, or very proud, or very careless never —pardon me—succeed with Society. You make a stir in it, perhaps, but that never lasts long: you won't take the pains to please it; and it soon leaves you for people who do. A witty thing comes into your head, and you say it, careless whom it may hit. You are bored by the vanity of other folks, and you show it, indifferent where you may offend. You won't conciliate big little people, and they in their spite set the big big people against you. So the snowball grows, and one day it gets large enough and hard enough to knock you out of Society altogether. People must make themselves agreeable to be agreeable to the world; yes, and eat a good deal of dust, too; that I concede. If they are very high and mighty by birth and all the rest of it, of course they can be as disagreeable as they choose, and make others eat the dust always. But if not, there is nothing for it but to toady. Believe me, nothing but to toady. Dear Lady Joan knows it. In her little way she succeeds thoroughly.

It's a very little way, I grant: to be visited like other people, and go to bankers' balls and clergymen's tea fights, and stand well in ordinary society generally. That's her ambition! But see how she attains to what she wants—just by smiling on women she hates, and making believe that a twopenny-halfpenny chaplain can send her to heaven on earth! Oh, it all seems unutterably small to you. I know that,' she said, with some impatience, as Etoile irreverently laughed. 'You clever poetic people have a sort of world of your own, a rock amongst the waves, like Chateaubriand's Tomb. But, after all, my dear creature, Society is not to be despised. It is *pleasant.* Pleasantness is the soft note of this generation, just as scientific assassination is the harsh note of it. The age is compounded of the two. Half of it is chloroform; the other half is dynamite. We are not brilliant, nor powerful, nor original; we shall never sparkle like the *beau siècle*, nor leave heirs to immortality like the Cinque Cento, nor shape the world anew like the early Christians, nor radiate with crystal clearness like the days of

Pericles. But when we are not murderous, we are pleasant, pre-eminently pleasant; we know how to gild things, we know how to gloss them, we know how to set chairs on wheels, and put spring cushions in them: we are the Age of Anæsthetics. We have invented painless dentistry and patent bedsteads, we have discovered chloral and condonation, and though we have, to be sure, to bear uncomfortable things like the telephone, the Commune, and Wagner, still we snooze ourselves asleep, and decide that since we must all die so soon we will be as comfortable as we can whilst we are living. It is the doctrine of Horace, with the poetry left out. We are like Tennyson's "Lotus-eaters:"—"Let us alone, what is there worth a row?" (Isn't that the line?) Now, you see, you people who will live on that rock in the midst of the sea, and fly across to us like eagles, only disturb us. That is the truth. You make us think, and Society dislikes thinking. You call things by their right names, and Society hates that, though Queen Bess didn't mind it. You trumpet our own littleness in our ear, and we know it so well that

we do not care to hear much about it. You shudder at sin, and we have all agreed that there is no such thing as sin, only mere differences of opinion, which, provided they don't offend us, we have no business with: adultery is a liaison, lying is gossip, debt is a momentary embarrassment, immorality is a little slip, and so forth; and when we have arranged this pretty little dictionary of convenient pseudonyms, it is not agreeable to have it sent flying by fierce, dreadful old words, that are only fit for some book that nobody ever reads, like Milton or the Family Bible. We do not want to think. We do not want to hear. We do not care about anything. Only give us a good dinner and plenty of money, and let us outshine our neighbours. There is the Nineteenth Century Gospel. My dear, if Ecclesiasticus himself came over from that rock of yours, he would preach in vain. You cannot convince people that don't want to be convinced. We call ourselves Christians—Heaven save the mark! —but we are only the very lowest kind of pagans. We do not believe in anything—except that nothing matters. Well, perhaps nothing does

matter. Only one wonders why ever so many of us were all created, only just to find *that* out.'

And Lady Cardiff, who sat and watched the world and her generation with the same contemptuous yet good-humoured amusement that she watched children plunder a Christmas tree, or maidens romp in a cotillon, drew a long breath as she ended her harangue, lighted a fresh cigarette as she rolled home in the dusk, and sighed for the days of Louis Quatorze.

'Why don't you talk, Io?' the Lady Joan was saying meanwhile, walking on under the trees past the kiosque.

'*Mais, ma chère*!—there is such a noise from all those carriages.'

'Stuff! There's no more noise than any other day. Did you see Etoile?'

'I saw her.'

'With Lady Cardiff. Horrid woman, Lady Cardiff. I can't think what you like in her, she is as insolent as ever she can be. I quite believe that story that Lord Cardiff left her because she horsewhipped him for driving another woman down to Richmond——'

'*Ça se peut*,' said Ioris with a little shrug of his shoulders.

'Unless it were *worse*,' said Lady Joan. 'Many people say it *was* worse. I do believe she's said something to the Monmouthshires, for they have refused my dinner. After my giving 'em all those things too; and I wanted 'em to meet the Norwiches and the Fingals, because Fingal's out of temper about that Tabernacle of Mimo's. Somebody's been nasty and told him it is all modern bits glued together.'

'But of course!' said Ioris with a certain contempt, as of one whose advice had been disregarded and was now proved right.

'Oh, of course! you're always so wise!' said his friend with much irritation. 'Of course, when he'd had the money in advance and there wasn't a tabernacle to be found, nobody could do otherwise, and Fingal was delighted with the thing, delighted, until some busybody went and put him out of conceit of it; Mimo has most excellent taste, nobody better.'

'Lord Fingal has better,' said Ioris coldly; 'the Tabernacle will blemish his chapel.'

'You've never seen his chapel, and never will, unless I take you to have your soul converted to the true faith, as the Moira old fudges wanted me to do—do you remember? If you didn't like Mimo's tabernacle, why didn't you let us sell the one out of Fiordelisa? *That's* genuine!'

'*Ma chère*,' said Ioris blandly. 'You know well that there is nothing I ever refuse you. All I reserve to myself is the altar my fathers knelt at. It is foolish, no doubt, but is a foolishness I cannot give up;——'

'Oh, no, you can be a mule when you like,' muttered Lady Joan, who had found him on matters that touched his ancestral creed immovable even under her menaces. Ioris was a man who clung to ancient faiths and ancient ways; he did not believe in them very devoutly indeed, because he was a man of the world and of his time; but he would not have them disturbed. Spoil or embellish, ruin or restore, the rest of Fiordelisa as she might, he had will enough of his own to bar her progress at the chapel door. The Lady Joan, who looked longingly

at its Della Robbias, its Cellini candlesticks, its old oak screen, its old marble altar, and its chased silver chalices, felt herself defrauded of her rights. 'All these thing growing mouldy for a set of peasants!' she would mutter, and in her mind's eye see them fittingly moved away to South Kensington, and did not despair even yet of one day so moving them.

At that moment Mr. Silverly Bell joined them in their walk. 'My dear St. Paul!' cried Lady Joan, enchanted: his baptismal name was Paul.

Mr. Silverly Bell was flattered and smiled. He had a soft sweet smile—never softer, never sweeter, than when he was carrying little drops of poison about in little sweetmeats of pretty phrases: that was his occupation. No one could say Mr. Silverly Bell was otherwise than good-natured; he never said an ill-natured thing; he only 'regretted,' only 'wished,' only 'feared.' When a person's character was so bad that as a saviour of society he was obliged to drown it in the tea-pot, he always sighed as he did so, tenderly, and wore a quite crushed air, as of extreme pain.

Lady Joan was very fond of him; she had not known him very long, indeed, but at a glance she had discovered the extreme usefulness of him—smile, sigh, and all. He had started with a prejudice against her, but he had been vanquished; she welcomed him so delightedly, invited him so persistently, praised him so ardently, that he could not but yield; and with this handsome woman on his arm at the spinsters' teas and the clergymen's gatherings, could not but feel meekly flattered. In return, he placed himself—smile, sigh, and all—at her disposal, and was of great value.

'Silverly Bell assures me there's nothing in it—nothing in it. He must know; he's always in her house,' said Mrs. Grundy time and again, when having received a momentary scare from the sight of Lady Joan rattling out at the gates with a gun between her knees, and the handsome profile of Ioris dark against the sun beside her, Mr. Silverly Bell reassured her seriously, and smoothed down her ruffled scruples with a few judicious words.

'What do I care for the old cats?' she would

say with a grin, twitching Pippo's reins, and flecking her whip over her tossing mane. But she did care, care endlessly, care with all her heart and soul. People who do not care do not say so. The soldier who is not afraid never boasts that he fears no ball.

The lawless gipsy half of her sent her across country with her whip and her cigar, her gun and her lover, rattling through the dust at full gallop, and showing her white teeth at broad jests that she shouted above the din of the wheels. But the coward in her was none the less powerful; and when the ponies were back in the stable, she would shake off the dust and don a full suit of decorum, and bear herself with cheerful countenance, and go through all the million and one ceremonials of commonplace existence with a zeal and a patience that demanded their reward and got it.

A woman who ought to be out of society, but, nevertheless, is always in it, commands the genuine respect of both sexes. She pleases them too; for she neither offends the stronger sex by too much virtue, nor offends the weaker sex by too much

effrontery. Lady Joan lunching meekly off cold lamb and lettuce with a clergyman's wife on a Sunday morning, and Lady Joan going joyously to champagne and caviare at the masquerade on a Sunday night, was an instance of that adaptability to circumstances which is the most popular of all qualities.

Mr. Silverly Bell, and such as he, enabled her to go at once to the lamb and lettuce, and to the champagne and caviare. She knew this, and petted Mr. Silverly Bell and his type accordingly.

It may be opposed to all the graceful theories on the relations of the sexes, but it is true that the woman who seeks the admiration of the majority, and shows that it is agreeable to her, will almost always secure it. She will turn against her the highest order of men indeed, but as this is a very small minority the loss will not be felt. In society, as in politics, the majority is the least intelligent but the most imposing section.

Happily for herself, she was so constituted that she could enjoy netting a minnow as much

as landing a sturgeon, and brought to her efforts at capture an infinite zest that was of itself assurance of success. She took so much trouble, she was so charmed with commonplaces, her smile beamed so radiantly, her hand pressed theirs so cordially, her manner was so accentuated with the strongest welcome and the most eager enjoyment of their companionship, that a man could hardly be otherwise than gratified with his own effect on her; and when he left her presence, could not do less than defend the good manners and good taste of a lady so favourable to himself.

The art of pleasing is more based on the art of seeming pleased than people think of, and she disarmed the prejudices of her enemies by the unaffected delight she appeared to take in themselves. You may think very ill of a woman, but after all you cannot speak very ill of her if she has assured you a hundred times that you are amongst her dearest friends.

And if a very fastidious mind is displeased with flattery, very fastidious minds are not general, and a taste for flattery is. 'Be honey,

and the flies will eat you,' says the old saw; but, like most other proverbs, it will not admit of universal application. There is a way of being honey that is thoroughly successful and extremely popular, and constitutes a kind of armour that is bomb-proof.

'Michael Angelo was a fool,' said Mr. Pratt, an English sculptor, who lived with Roman princes, and was called Pheidias Pratt by artists in general, and took the derision seriously as a compliment—to Pheidias—and would demonstrate to you that the Apollo of the Belvedere was nothing so very extraordinary after all.

'A sublime fool, but a fool!' said Pheidias Pratt, shifting his scarlet fez on one side. 'Did all his work himself; only think of the waste of power! Half his years spent in chipping; lost in mere stonemason's labour. Now, I keep sixty workmen; I never touch the marble—never touch it!—and look what numbers of statues I can turn out in the year.'

'And the ideas, Mr. Pratt?' said Etoile. 'Do you hire them also, or do you do without them?'

'The ideas! the ideas!' echoed Pheidias with

a stare; and the good fellow walked off huffed in his velvet gown, amongst his marble children, who all gazed vacuously into space with scarcely more soul in any one of them than in the carven doll of a Swabian toy-maker.

He had married, twenty years before, twenty thousand a year in the person of an alderman's heiress, and his works were to be seen in law courts and public halls, gentlemen's mansions and people's parks. What did he want with ideas? Nevertheless, he felt the allusion to such a thing was in very bad taste.

The Lady Joan, who had brought Etoile to the studio, grinned as she herself fell into ecstasies over a Desolation, the embroideries of whose tunic she declared she felt she must pick off with a pair of scissors: the marble was so exactly like thread.

'How could you inquire for such "outsiders" as ideas?' she murmured to Etoile. 'Of course he hires his ideas; clever young Italians sell heaps of ideas for a hundred francs. All that's dear old Phid's own in his sculptures is his name on the pedestals.'

'Poor Michael Angelo!'

The Lady Joan laughed.

'Well, I don't think you need put yourself out for him; he's pretty safe, and I don't think Phid here will go down to posterity with him. But Phid will hate you, you know, for ever. Why don't you tell him that Venus at the Bath is beautiful?'

'A bathing woman, that must have been modelled at Trouville? With a hip out of joint, too, look!'

'Phid gives capital parties, and he's "coining" every day,' said Lady Joan, dryly. 'And his wife has the longest and the nastiest tongue in Europe.'

And she swam after the sulking Phidias and told him that his Sabrina was the noblest work of the century; Sabrina was robed from head to foot; Mr. Pheidias Pratt thought the nude barbarous; he held, too, that it was very easy—only study anatomy, and there you were.

'A very intelligent woman, that wife of Challoner's,' said the good Pheidias to his own wife, a few hours later. 'If I were you I'd call

on her; it isn't worth while to be too starchy: of course she larks about with Ioris and all that kind of thing; but it's no business of ours if the husband like it; and she tells me Lord Hebrides is her cousin. The Hebrides are here this winter. I'd leave a bit of pasteboard if I were you.'

His wife, who hitherto had always insisted that the Casa Challoner was too flagrant to be entered, because she herself came from Clapham and had severe notions, allowed herself to be persuaded against her conscience, and left the bit of pasteboard, and a few days later a larger piece inscribed, 'Mrs. Pratt. At Home. Tuesdays'—with a very small 'music' hiding itself in the corner.

Lady Joan gave a grimace of triumph before the big card. Mrs. Pratt's musical Tuesdays were amongst the choicest gatherings of the season; all the embassies went there, and hitherto Lady Joan had languished in vain for an entrance.

Of course a similar big card was delivered at the house of Ioris. Society, provided only you will wash your cup and platter, will always oblige you in these little things.

Mrs. Pratt had been six years bringing her Clapham conscience into recognition of the Casa Challoner; but having brought her conscience round, she at last brought it round with a handsome sweep, and knew the polite ways of society too much not to follow them, and sent the big card to Ioris, so that he might enter her presence with the Lady Joan, and be at hand for the Lady Joan's fan on the Lady Joan's wish to walk about the rooms, or the Lady Joan's carriage when the party was over. Mrs. Pheidias Pratt knew that as a leader of society she must be amiable in such matters.

So did Lady Joan gain her point, by merely pretending to want her scissors to pick off the embroideries of a marble Desolation, and by saying a Sabrina surpassed Praxiteles and Donatello.

Who should say she was not a cleverer woman than Etoile?

Certainly Mrs. Pratt left cards little and big on Etoile, as she would have done on Phryne or Mephistopheles, had she met either of them at Princess Vera's; but Mr. Pratt said to his wife that he was sure there would be something queer about

her somewhere which would come out some day, and Mrs. Pratt pursed her mouth to her friend: 'Y—e—es. We do receive her. We met her at Princess Vera's. But, *who was she?* That is what I never can learn.'

'*Who was she?*' said Mrs. Pratt with sepulchral whisper and solemn stare, and had a way of saying it, and of vaguely implying a great deal by the way she said it, for which Lady Joan could have kissed her, 'detestable old woman,' with her dukes and duchesses, and rubbish, though the Lady Joan had always considered her to be. For the Lady Joan did not permit other people to air dukes and duchesses; as for herself, dukes and duchesses were all her cousins, and came in handy when she wanted to impress the small fry of society; that was different: when you are born a Perth-Douglas, and want to sell a teacup or a triptych, you must employ the advantages that Nature has given you.

But she was very often so out of temper with herself that neither dukes nor duchesses, teacups or triptychs could reconcile her to life. She knew very well that when she had been presented at

seventeen, handsome, blackbrowed, and Spanish looking, there had been no reason in life why she should not have become an English duchess in her own person. By temper she was ambitious, by nature she longed for place and power; she knew very well that her life was a *coup manqué;* and now and then some irritated pride at the smallness of her aims, and the pigmy proportions of her results, would wake in her, and make her acrid and disappointed and enraged with her past and her present. There were times when she realised that her life was, after all, obscure and little and ignoble.

Sometimes it made her in such a rage with herself that she shook her fist at the image of her black brows in her mirror. For she was shrewd enough, and—in her own odd way—proud enough, to hate herself heartily at times for all the dust she ate, and all the honey she prepared for the eating of Society. And still more she hated those who had sight enough to see the dust on her mouth, and the honey in her hands, and amongst them she instinctively numbered Etoile.

She began to detest Etoile with that vehement

and concentrated dislike which is only the stronger because it cannot explain itself, or put any clear name to its origin.

Something in the glance of Etoile stung her conscience; something in her smile made her pride wince; she was always fancying that Etoile was thinking of all Voightel had told her of those days when the champagne had been in the ice-pails on the house-tops in Damascus: Voightel had told her nothing, but the Lady Joan would never have credited that. Somehow, too, before Etoile's life—meditative, poetic, studious, always aloof from the world even when in the world—her own life seemed common and bustling, and base and ridiculous. At the bottom of her soul lay a contempt for herself, a bitter and restless contempt: it stirred in her, and stung her in this stranger's presence—and she hated her.

CHAPTER XV.

'WHY don't people like Etoile?' said Lady Cardiff.

'Don't they like her?' said a Russian Baroness. 'I do.'

'You do, my dear, I do, a hundred clever people do, but not the majority!'

'I will tell you why,' said Princess Vera, who was in her own house, and to whom these ladies had come as an amateur-deputation about a great charity ball at the Capitol.

'Yes, well?' said Lady Cardiff, in expectation of a titbit of news.

'She likes to see the sun rise,' said Princess Vera.

'What? The sun rise in winter!'

'In winter and summer. Unnatural, isn't it?' said Princess Vera, lifting her lovely head from an old miniature she was copying. 'It is those unnatural tastes that we find unpleasant. The traditional lady who answered naively that she did not care for innocent pleasures was the one candid person of all womanhood, depend on it, and represented a sentiment more general than we like to acknowledge. A woman who does like innocent pleasures is to us just what a writer who won't take money for his books, or a painter who won't sell his pictures, is to all other writers and all other painters. Nothing is so objectionable in anybody as to be above everybody else's tastes and necessities. When we come from our balls feeling ugly and untidy, and *ennuyées*, and see her just coming out of the door beginning the day, we feel to dislike her. It is all the sunrise. Nothing else.'

People laughed. Princess Vera, who was always lovely, and never *ennuyée*, and cared for sunrises herself, could afford to say such things.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams, who was present, felt

angry, though she never dared to open her lips before Princess Vera.

'Of course one aren't as neat and spry comin' out as goin' in, and after the cotillon how should we be? but there's no call for her to say so,' she thought, feeling personally aggrieved and wondering if Princess Vera had seen her curl drop off into the soup, as it had done at the Japanese Embassy supper on the previous night.

Princess Vera was quite right: Society was naturally suspicious of such a queer taste for sunrises.

Society could never understand it. Why should anybody who wasn't *obliged*, go out early? All the pretty fashionable women who waltzed themselves half out of their sleeveless boddices till sunrise dawned on them drinking hot soup and champagne, and then slept serenely with chloral's benign aid till it was time to have their complexions 'done up,' never could understand or forgive a woman who walked, drove, or rode in solitude while the dew was still fresh.

For some years the world that talked about

her had thought Etoile went out for mysterious intrigues, which intention would have redeemed the unnatural action and made it more natural; but being at length after several seasons compelled to conclude that this explanation was impossible, the eccentricity of the habit could be only annoying.

That she went for mere air, mere exercise, and the charm that lies in the freshness and silence of the early day, was a thing far too simple to be grasped by the astute intelligence of an experienced Society.

The simplicity of the artist is always the stumbling-block of the artist with the world.

One early morning, following this habit, she was wandering alone with her dog under the woods of the Pamphili Doria, where she had especial permission to drive at her pleasure. In the breezy uplands of that lovely place she rambled ankle-deep in violets, lost in thought, the dreamy scholarly fanciful thought which Rome begets in any contemplative mind; suddenly her thoughts were scattered by the excitement and apparent sorrow of Tsar, who ran to and fro,

whining and pawing at some object on the grass under the oak trees. On going nearer to the dog, she found outstretched there a woman who had fainted, and was lying insensible.

She was young and handsome, though her face had the gaunt grey leanness of long hunger, and her bones seemed almost starting through the skin. When the woman came to herself, she moaned for her child, refusing to be comforted, and begging to be taken home. 'Home' was a miserable garret, in a dark and loathsome lane of crowded hovels.

Etoile had her taken there, and followed her.

In the garret was a baby of two years old; he was rosy and well; the mother had starved herself to give him the little food she could get. By little and little she told her story, a very trite one: she was an Hungarian, a ballet dancer, engaged at fifteen years old to follow a wandering Viennese troop, and, falling ill, left behind them unpaid; for the enterprise had not succeeded. In her poverty and beauty a young French painter had found her and loved her: she had been happy for six months. Then her

lover had deserted her, gone to his own country, promising to return; he had written once or twice, but never now for two years. She had no relatives and no friends. Dance any more she could not, for her ankle had been broken in a stage trap, and though well again, had been ill set and was stiff. Friendless, sick, and wretched, she had dropped from one depth to another depth, lower and lower, but keeping herself honest that the boy might not blush for her in his manhood.

She had gone into the Pamphili woods to gather violets to sell, and had fainted as she had stooped to the first flower. It was one of those short sad stories which lie thick and common as dust under the roofs of great cities. Death comes and brushes such dust away; and it gathers again by the morrow.

Etoile, returning to see her later in the day, and welcomed in the wretched attic with touching gratitude, found that the poor creature's one desire was to get some means of maintenance for herself and the child in Rome. She could not bear to leave the place where her love's short joys

had been known, and where her lover, she always hoped, might one day or other return.

She did not know what to do, but was willing to do anything 'that would not make the child ashamed.' The sculptors would have paid her to let them model her form, which was symmetrically beautiful; but better death, even for the boy, than that, she thought. She clung with absolute fidelity to her lover's memory.

The hive of wretched houses in which she dwelt was in the heart of Rome, and almost touched the back of the Casa Challoner. When with an aching heart she left the garret, the little child stretching his arms out after her, and the mother blessing her and her dog too for rescue from the grave, it was twilight in the short wintry day, and the lamp, lighted before the doorway of the Temple of all the Virtues, caught her sight as it glanced through the gloom.

'Perhaps she could help me to help her,' thought Etoile. She vaguely doubted in all things the woman who Voightel had said would be to her the Prose of Rome, yet the energy and promptitude of a character utterly opposite to

her own as vaguely impressed her by its very unlikeness to herself. The Hungarian girl, in her wretchedness, was only divided by a few yards from the cosy mirthful chambers of the Casa Challoner. To speak of her might perhaps secure her a friend there.

It was a Wednesday, and several of the heavy landaus that yearly bear to and fro their freight of rich foreign visitors about the streets of Rome were standing before the house. Etoile descended from her own carriage, and remembered that she ought weeks before to have attended one of these solemn rites.

The house looked curiously changed. It made her think of Sganarelle drawing a long face to feel the patient's pulse.

There was no scent in the Turkish room save from a fountain of eau de Cologne; there was a tea-urn in the Turkish room solemn as a high altar; there were crowds entirely composed of ladies, and serried ranks of dowagers and spinsters bolt upright on the Turkish divans. There was a murmur of small talk like the unending murmur of the sea; the Bishop of Melita and a Dean of

St. Edmund's conversed together in the centre of the chamber; Mr. Challoner had become 'dear Robert,' and was handing bread and butter; and amidst it all stood the Lady Joan with a little ruff round her throat, and a grey gown, who was asking after a baby's health with eager solicitude, and standing with her little girl's curls pressed tenderly to her side, herself smiling sweetly in the face of Mrs. Grundy, as typified at that moment by Lady George Scrope-Stair and that very proper little person, Mrs. Macscrip.

Mrs. Grundy was in great force, indeed, in all her types there, and the Lady Joan, with her hand on her child's neck, was saying apologetically—

'Well, you know, I don't like it, and that's the truth. Of course there are unpleasant sort of stories, and Mr. Challoner doesn't approve my being much with her. But, you know, I'm always good-natured, and my father is such a dear blind goose——'

'The Comtesse d'Avesnes!' shouted her servant between the silk curtains of her drawing-room doorway.

The serried battalions of Mrs. Grundy's forces

fell asunder with a shock, and some dropped their biscuits, and one even dropped her cup. The Lady Joan, however, who never dropped anything except an inconvenient memory or an unremunerative acquaintance, rushed forward with cordial smile and outstretched hands.

'Too good of you. What a pleasure! You, who despise tea-fights, too! Do come to the fire. Effie, go and fetch the cream!'

Little Effie, bringing the cream, looked softly at Etoile, who had been kind to her, and timidly stroked the silver fox furs of her dress.

'I like you,' said the child in a nervous little voice. 'Why did mama say—— ?'

'Effie, hand the cake to Lady George,' said Mr. Challoner, who was standing on guard by the hearthrug, having just safely left the Bishop and the Dean cordially discussing the state of the Colonial Church. The child, frightened, slid timidly away, and it never occurred to Etoile that the words which she had partially overheard on her entrance could by any chance whatever have referred to herself.

The serried ranks of Mrs. Grundy drew away

from the fire, and, as around a safe and holy sanctuary, closed round the tea-table where the Scrope-Stair sisters, in bonnetless intimacy, were presiding over the urn.

'Dear Lady Joan is too good-natured,' sighed Mrs. Grundy, *sotto voce*, and the Scrope-Stair sisters murmured back—

'Oh, yes, you know; it is her independence and nobleness. She never *will* believe in the possibility of evil.'

Mrs. Grundy shook her head, and glancing towards the fire wondered what the cost of the silver fox furs had been. Why could questionable characters always dress so well? Mrs. Grundy does not always dress well.

Lady Cardiff nodded from her corner by the hearth, where she had ensconced herself with her eye-glass, and motioned Etoile to a seat beside her.

'How do, my dear Comtesse? Cold day, isn't it? What a charming gown. And those *niello* buttons too—delicious! It's quite amusing here; only one's always afraid she'll come out with something for one to buy. If it wasn't for that appre-

hension it would really be delicious to see her butter all those bores and do the proper for Mrs. Grundy. I've said I'd the toothache, and kept quiet just to watch her. It's great fun. How does she square it with all her little games! But the little games are only the boldness of innocence. So Mimo says. He must know.'

Lady Cardiff put up her eye-glass to look at Mrs. Henry V. Clams' Bretonne toilette (the entire costume of a fisher girl, correctly copied, in *feuille-morte* velvet, and navy blue satin, with a merveilleuse bonnet to crown it appropriately), and Lady Cardiff said aloud for the benefit of neighbours that His Holiness was very ill, the old trouble in the legs, and then, sinking her voice, continued:—

'In Spain, you know, my dear, when a lovely woman has had an adventure, her friends say she has eaten a lily. That's just what her friends say. She munches her leeks, and they swear they're lilies. Happy creature! All comes of a wooden husband, as I told you the other day, and her admirable faculty of boring herself to death. She will hear me? Nonsense; she is screaming

into Lady George Scrope's ear-trumpet. If she did hear, she'd only ask me to dinner and sell me a *magot.* That's her way of revenging herself. She's been dying to be acquainted with the Monmouthshires for four winters, but they never would let her be introduced to them. (You know whom I mean—*the* Monmouthshires—she's the Duke of Brecon's sister). Well, when I was with them one day last week, in comes my Lady Joan, bold as brass, and with her pockets full of all the sweepings of her *bric-à-brac* shops, and rosaries of olives that she gathered herself upon Olivet—all these as offerings to Anne Monmouthshire, who is perfectly mad on the subject of a lottery for the blind English in Rome. (I believe there are six of them blind, or some such number.) And all these sweepings and olives were for that lottery. The bait took—yes the bait took. Anne Monmouthshire, who always loathed her, has returned her card, and has certainly invited her to a musical party next week. Now *you,* instead of doing a thing like that, only find out sick old folks and do good to them, and let nobody be the wiser!'

'There! there!' said Lady Cardiff, vivaciously, interrupting herself as a haughty-looking dowager, with a very aquiline nose, and very fine sables, sailed into the room. 'Didn't I tell you so? Just look at her. There's Anne Monmouthshire actually come on her *day*! Watch her now. Watch her! What eagerness, what cordiality, what ecstasy! Dear me, how very funny it is that anybody born a Perth-Douglas should be such a snob. She pined four whole winters to get the Monmouthshires here, and now she's done it, just by those shop-sweepings and olives. Really she ought to have been a greater creature than she is! Oh, I see you despise all these things. You are leagues above such considerations. You are governed by your sympathies and your antipathies. You seek or shun other folks by no better rule than their merit or demerit. What can be more indiscreet? You like people who can be of no manner of service to you, and dislike all sorts of great personages. Pardon me, but that is not how Society is carried on. Society is an aggregate of personal enemies—all women are all women's enemies,

and most women are most men's enemies, too, if men did but know it, which they don't; but hostility should never interfere with prudence. A grain of sand may blind a Sampson, or a Sappho: that is the figure that should always loom large before any of us. Don't provoke the sand with a whirlwind: take a watering pot. That is where our admirable Lady Joan is pre-eminent. To look at her she should raise the whirlwind; with an oriental profile and a mastiff's jaw, one would expect a whirlwind from her. Not a bit of it; she has a nice green watering pot, like a true British horticulturist, and she smooths her sand diligently with a silver shower from the parish pump. The whirlwind does the world good; it clears the mist, it sweeps away the pestilence, it bears the eagles as the sea her ships, and drives the clouds before it. Oh yes, and it's very nice in epic poetry. But the watering pot is a much meeker domestic servant, and a much more popular instrument. If you would use the watering pot, my dear, you would never get the dust in your eyes.'

Wherewith Lady Cardiff rose and swam away

majestically to her friend Anne Monmouthshire, and said very cruelly:

'Didn't know you knew Lady Joan, my love! Delighted to meet you so unexpectedly. Have you come to get any more rosaries? Gathered the olives yourself, dear Lady Joan, didn't you, and on Olivet? Dear me, how charming; just like Noah's dove. Wasn't it Noah's dove?'

Meanwhile Mrs. Henry V. Clams approached Etoile, who always filled her with that uncomfortable sensation which Burns embodies as the idea that 'a chiel's amang us takin' notes,' and engaging her timidly in conversation, invited her to dinner—a very great dinner to be given in twelve days from that time.

Etoile declined on the plea that she had come for health, and went out very little. Mrs. Henry V. Clams suddenly felt that the Bretonne costume was loud, and the merveilleuse bonnet incongruous. 'She's real nasty,' thought that good-natured lady.

At that moment there entered a person very unlike the Bishop of Melita and the Dean of St. Edmund's—a graceful and distinguished-looking

person, with a charming smile and a perfect bow.

Lady Cardiff put up her eyeglass.

'Dear me! There's Ioris!' she said to her friend, Anne Monmouthshire, whom she had cruelly possessed herself of, and drawn away near the door. 'Dear me! Husbands usually shirk these "days," but he and Mr. Challoner are really most exemplary. What do I mean? Oh, I don't mean anything, of course, my dear. Nice-looking man, isn't he? Such *race* about him. Somehow he doesn't go well with the tea-urn, do you think? and the Bishop? You are quite delighted with her? To be sure, why shouldn't you be? I'm sure she tries hard to please you, and she never did anything in the East, you know, but gather those olives; never anything! Such a pretty idea, too, Olives from Olivet!'

Meanwhile, as Ioris entered, the brow of his hostess grew black as night. 'You're an hour too early; how could you be such a fool?' she muttered roughly. 'You ought always to let 'em all be gone; I've told you so fifty hundred times.'

He murmured penitent apologies, greeted the

saints around the tea-urn gaily and gracefully, and crossed to the sinner in the silver furs. 'I saw your liveries at the door, so I ventured to enter,' he murmured to Etoile; Mr. Challoner shifted his eyeglass with a grim smile, and, vacating his post by the fire, asked Mrs. Grundy if the Chemnitz scandal were not a terrible blow to Society. Mr. Challoner always spoke of Society with peculiar tenderness and respect, as if it were his elder brother.

The Baroness Chemnitz, who had dealt this blow, was a beautiful young Roman, with a head as perfect as a narcissus, and a body as graceful as its stem. She had been wedded by a ruined family to a great German capitalist at eighteen. She had decorated his wonderful Louis Quinze houses and Renaissance hotels for some five or six seasons. She had seen all the world dance in her gorgeous rooms until ten in the morning in Paris, Berlin, and Rome. Then a great love had entered into her; a whirlwind of passion that transformed the pale, pensive narcissus into a purple passiflora with a heart of fire. She fell, but she fell grandly. She erred, but she never

swerved from her punishment. She faced the wrath of her husband, the fury of her family, the rage of the world. She confessed herself guilty, and claimed her separation, and left all the gold and the glories of her place, and went out to face solitude—for her lover even turned against her; lovers like Society dislike a storm, and blame a hesitation to deceive. The husband had to be held back by main force from her destruction; she hurled her hatred of him in his teeth, and shook herself free from the trammels of his riches, and went down into the dust of obscurity. What could an outraged Society do?—such a woman as this was unnatural. To old Greek times perhaps she might belong, but born under the Second Empire of France, surely she should have known some better way than this.

She was in love of course—women always were—but then to leave such luxury for love!

What depravity! sighed Society. Such a ball as her last was—diamond rings and sapphire lockets given away like pebbles in the cotillon, and twenty thousand francs spent in forced strawberries alone!—how stupid, when, with

a little management, nothing need have been known, you know!—her bedroom hung with white satin, embroidered with wreaths of roses; her footmen to be counted by the score; her lovers like the dreams of Aladdin; and, to leave all that, when with a little tact!—— was there ever such unheard-of madness?—to make an abominable *éclat*, when with only a grain of sense no one need have suspected anything!—to lose a fortune counted by trillions, because she could not smile in her lord's eyes, and lie a little gracefully, and manage things quite quietly, as good-breeding teaches every one! What insuperable idiotcy!—what inconceivable baseness! Did she not know better her mere duty to Society?

What did Society care for the woman's agony, for her long temptation, for her piteous feebleness, for the mute misery with which she had played her part in the gorgeous pageant of her life; for the passionate sickness for one voice, one glance, one touch, which had made her cast away all the pomp and powers of her place, and fling herself into the dust for love alone?

What did they know or care? They only saw a fool who forfeited pride and pleasure and possession; who left wealth and ease and the delights of boundless extravagance behind her as so much dross; who could not lie, who would not be bribed, who would not be content with treachery and vice, but craved for liberty, and stooped to truth! Society was outraged.

If her precedent were followed—what balls would there be to go to? A husband who leapt like a lion to avenge his own dishonour, and a wife who shook off millions like dust from her unfaltering feet! Society was aghast—nothing frightens it like passion. For what does Passion care to amuse Society?

Society with one voice proclaimed Geltrude Chemnitz the vilest of her sex; and, now around the Lady Joan's tea-table, agreed with Mr. Challoner that in these flagrant cases Society could not be too severe. Society, which invited Lady Joan and Ioris to the same entertainments; Society, which smiled and sniggered with vile beneficence on a million illicit unions; Society, which had invented and patronised those blas-

phemies of 'friendship' and fervent parodies of 'purity'; Society, which pressed the wife's wedded hand warm from her lover's lips, so long as the husband presided blandly at the desecration of his hearth; Society, which smiled good-humouredly on the 'little weaknesses' of post-nuptial loves so long as the supplanted lord had neither modesty enough to feel his shame, nor virility enough to take his vengeance; Society, which crowned the adulteress, and welcomed her, so long as she kept a lie upon her mouth, and had a bold front lifted to the gaze of men; Society, which only when the man was roused as man, and the woman could blush as woman, saw 'any harm whatever,' and only when the doors were shut, the tables feastless, and the world forgot in woe, found out that sin was after all an ugly thing, and faithless wives were wantons.

'It is such a grievous thing when a woman forgets herself!' said the Lady Joan who had danced at the last monster ball in the Louis Quinze rooms, and ordered Io to bring her her chicken and champagne in tones that a kindly duchess would barely use to a steward's-room boy.

She herself never forgot herself; she only forgot other people—when they were of no use to her—which does not matter at all.

What a fool the beautiful wife of Baron Chemnitz looked to her!—to have only one lover in all your life, and let everybody know it, and leave white satin bedrooms and Louis Quinze dining rooms, diamonds as big as marbles, and horses from the imperial haras, and all the rest of it, with a horrible rupture and uproar, so that all Europe heard of the crime!

It made Lady Joan quite ferocious to think what chances other women had and what dire mess and misuse they made of them. Only see what *she* did—with little rooms like band-boxes, and no money to speak of, and never a Louis Quinze mirror in the house at all, unless it were bought to be sold on the morrow.

She felt more respect than ever for herself; and felt that there was some use after all events in a Mr. Challoner, just as there is no doubt in sea-anemones and houseflies, and other inferior creations, whose existence a superior humanity is apt thoughtlessly to resent as uselessly and

insignificantly superfluous, and occasionally prominently disagreeable.

'My! It's a caution, aren't it!' said Mrs. Henry V. Clams thoughtlessly, biting a piece out of a bit of Madeira cake.

Lady Joan looked severe as Diana Nemorensis. A caution! Who wanted 'a caution' in good society? Did not Mrs. Henry V. Clams know that she was eating cake in the Temple of All the Virtues?

'It is disgusting; perfectly disgusting,' she said with severity. 'And to think we all went to her only last week! Really, it is quite horrible, isn't it? It makes one almost feel ashamed oneself.'

'I don't see no call to do that,' said Mrs. Henry V. Clams, reddening a little, for she had brought a sort of conscience out of the land of wooden nutmegs, and never could attain the sublime audacity of the Lady Joan's panoply of perfection. 'I don't see no call to do that. We aren't no kith or kin to her, poor soul. Oh, my! she'll miss it fine, I reckon—do you mind that *rivière* Chemnitz gave her New Year's Day?

Pearls as big as plover's eggs, weren't they now? She must be downright vicious.'

'Innate depravity!' said the Lady Joan. 'Well, she'll starve now, thank goodness. She hasn't a penny of her own, you know.'

And the ladies present, who had all danced and drunk, and borne off the costly cotillon toys from the Chemnitz balls throughout four carnivals, agreed that she ought to starve; all except Mrs. Henry V. Clams, who was too good-natured, and whose conscience was pricking her.

The Prince Ioris turned round in the low chair where he sat by the hearth beside Etoile, and murmured a word in favour of his lovely countrywoman.

'The blame is hardly Geltrude's,' he said gently; 'I knew her from her infancy; she was of the sweetest nature; but her people forced her into a marriage that she loathed; she was frank and fearless, and our women are not cold, mesdames; love to them——'

'Hold your tongue, Io! This is not the place to talk in such a way,' said Lady Joan sharply with a heavy frown. 'There is no excuse

for Madame Chemnitz; not the slightest. She should have done her duty. It was certainly gilded enough to make it easy!'

Ioris was silent, and turning back again to the fire, resumed his conversation with Etoile. When your lady-love arrays herself in ruffs and farthingale of social virtue, there is obviously nothing to do but to be silent. You cannot quarrel with her for having managed so well that, whilst she smiles upon you she yet makes the world smile on her: it would be both impolite and ungrateful.

'I am pained for Chemnitz; very pained; what can riches compensate to a man for dishonour?' said Mr. Challoner, sternly gazing at the teapot. The assembled ladies murmured applause to so beautiful if hackneyed a sentiment.

'Lord! what a liar that man is!' thought Mrs. Henry V. Clams, and went to her carriage to take up Fontebranda at the club.

Fontebranda never asked her to make Mr. Henry V. Clams lie in that manner: Fontebranda only said to her, 'Get a great cook; give three big balls a winter, and drive English horses;

you need never consider Society then, it will never find fault with you, *ma très-chère.*'

She did not quite understand, but she obeyed; and Society never did. Society says to the members of it as the Spanish monk to the tree that he pruned, and that cried out under his hook :—

'It is not beauty that is wanted of you, nor shade, but olives.'

Moral loveliness or mental depth, charm of feeling or nobleness of instinct, beauty, or shade, it does not ask for, but it does ask for olives—olives that shall round off its dessert, and flavour its dishes, and tickle its sated palate : olives that it shall pick up without trouble, and never be asked to pay for : these are what it likes.

Now it is precisely in olives that the woman who has one foot in Society and one foot out of it will be profuse.

She must please, or perish.

She must content, or how will she be countenanced ?

The very perilousness of her position renders her solicitous to attract and to appease.

Society follows a natural selfishness in its

condonation of her; she is afraid of it, therefore she must bend all her efforts to be agreeable to it; it can reject her at any given moment, so that her court of it must be continual and expansive. No woman will take so much pains, give so much entertainment, be so willing to conciliate, be so lavish in hospitality, be so elastic in willingness, as the woman who adores Society, and knows that any Black Saturday it may turn on her with a bundle of rods, and a peremptory dismissal.

Between her and Society there is a tacit bond.

'Amuse me, and I will receive you.'

'Receive me, and I will amuse you.'

Meanwhile Lady Joan dismissed, one by one, the whole battalion of Mrs. Grundy's forces, and the lighter squadrons of airy ladies who had carried off the gold toys from the Chemnitz cotillons, and heard the carriages of the deans and the dowagers, and the bankers' wives, and the more modest cabs of the minor acquaintances, roll away towards the Corso in the dusk. The Scrope-Stairs bonneted and cloaked themselves, and also prepared to depart.

'They are excellent persons,' Ioris had said confidentially of them to Etoile, that day in the corner by the fire:—'*Ma! mi seccano!* They are the sort of women we put in convents in our country. It is terrible that the English have nowhere to put their unmarriageable women, but can only let them overrun other lands, like flocks of goats, stray and unhappy.'

'You are very ungrateful; they adore you, all these sisters.'

'Oh! *C'est le pire défaut!*' had rejoined Ioris with his light laugh.

But the Scrope-Stairs sisters, assisting at the tea-table, had heard nothing of this, and little divined what he had been saying as he had sat in the corner by the fire, in the low chair that Lady Cardiff had vacated.

'Io,' said Lady Joan, as the sisters embraced her in adieu, and with that glitter of wrath in her eyes which Ioris knew but too well; 'the girls can't go by themselves, and I can't spare anybody. See them home, will you? Get back by seven; Ronsoulet will be here, you know, and Victor.'

Ioris glanced at Etoile, hesitated, sighed, and offered his escort to the sisters.

'They might go from the Campidoglio to Soracte, no one would stop them,' he thought to himself, but courtesy was his nature, and obedience to his tyrant was second nature.

'He'd have gone home with *her* if I hadn't sent him off,' thought the Lady Joan, wondering why Etoile still remained in the low chair by the fire.

'I lingered behind your other visitors because I want your advice if you will give it me,' said Etoile, as though answering her thoughts, as the door closed upon Ioris, and Mr. Challoner vanished into his own den.

She responded eagerly, all attention in an instant, remembering that Etoile had bought a good deal of brocade.

'Delighted! Anything I can do—only tell me. What is it?'

To her view 'helping people' always meant advising them to buy *bric-à-brac*, and who heartily resolved that if it meant furniture, china, or stuffs, she must send Mimo a hint to

get out all the best things he had, and to mind all the marks and the millesimes were correct.

Etoile sat down beside her, and told her the story of the dancing-girl who was starving behind the wall of her house.

'The little boy is lovely,' she said, when she had ended the sad little history, 'and the woman, I am sure, would interest you if you saw her. She would die, and even let the child die, sooner than be faithless to her faithless lover.'

Lady Joan listened with cooled interest. Since it was not teacups and triptychs, why was she bored about it?

'Very interesting, no doubt,' she said drily. 'But rather immoral, don't you think?'

'Immoral? No; there are many things more immoral—Mrs. Henry V. Clams, for instance.'

The Lady Joan winced. She hesitated a moment whether she would seem very virtuous or seem very charitable and beyond all prejudices.

'It is too kind of you to be so interested,' she said at length. 'You must tell it all to Io; he'll be rushing off directly, with soup in one

hand and bank-notes in the other. Certainly, the girl's case is very sad; but then, you see, she brought it on herself. Why did she listen to her painter before she saw the marriage-lines? I should think your best way would be to speak to the Austrian Consul, or perhaps your Princess Vera would condescend. I think they'd send her back for nothing, and I suppose she has some friends?'

'None, I believe,' said Etoile. 'But do not trouble yourself; it will not cost much to set her up in some little trade that will enable her to keep herself and the boy. That is all I meant to ask your advice about.'

'Of course I would do anything in charity that I could,' said Lady Joan, vaguely feeling that she had made a wrong move. 'But a ballet girl and an illegitimate child and all that—one hardly knows what to do. I've just sent a housemaid away for light conduct. One must be just—one must not put a premium on immorality.'

'It is a pity Society often allows so high a one!' answered Etoile with that flash of contempt which the Casa Challoner was learning to

fear. Lady Joan, however, was always ready for any thrust.

'I don't think Society does,' she answered; she always defended Society since Society accepted her. 'It gives certain rules, and if you keep to them it has no business to attack you, and never does in point of fact. Women are rash themselves and headstrong, and do foolish things, and then they complain of Society. I've no prejudices—not one—I would just as soon shake hands with your ballet-girl as with a duchess. But, you see, as long as one lives in the world one can't follow every impulse of one's heart, and these poor girls just throw themselves away on some headlong passion, and then think it very cruel of humanity not to be ready with gold christening cups and rose silk cradles for their babies. Their fate's very dreadful and very hard, no doubt, but they make it themselves, you see.'

'By forgetting themselves, which women in Society never do, no doubt.'

'Of course they never do, except that ass of a Geltrude Chemnitz! If you don't remember

yourself, who will?' said the Lady Joan with a pleasant laugh, ignoring the equivoque. 'As for the world well lost for love, and all that, it's rubbish, you know. The world is too strong for anybody that sets up against it. And when you've lost the world, *i.e.*, your bread and cheese in it, love flies out of the window. That's common sense.'

'It would be common sense then if this poor Hungarian descended to infamy to feed herself.'

'Just so. Having once slipt into the pit to gather a flower, she ought to go down to the bottom to pick up a bit of silver. But that's the sort of consistency you poetical creatures never possess. You will fling yourselves to perdition in a *furia* of self-sacrifice, and then you are supremely astonished that the world only thinks you a donkey, whose legs are broken. Society can't classify. It only lays down a few broad lines, and packs into two sets the people who keep in 'em, and the people who jump over 'em. Unjust? Oh, I daresay. But the thing is so. It's no good kicking against the pricks.

No doubt Magdalen is a charming person, utterly underrated, and very much misjudged, and all the rest of it; but all that common folk can judge by is that she has dragged her hair in the dust, and has made a beast of herself——'

'Without corresponding advantages!'

Lady Joan laughed, but when she was on her high horse of morality, she rode it with cynicism indeed, but with consummate coolness, and would now and then enumerate opinions with which Hannah More herself could have found no fault. Indeed, to do her justice, women who sacrificed themselves—at a loss—did seem to her 'too poor for heaven, and too pale for hell.'

'I am shocked at you,' she said, with her frankest smile. 'What is the use of railing against Society? Society, after all, is only Humanity *en masse*, and the opinion of it must be the opinion of the bulk of human minds. Complaints against Society are like the lions' against the man's picture. No doubt the lions would have painted the combat as going just the other way, but then, so long as it is the man who has the knife or the gun, and the palette and the

pencil, where is the use of the lions howling about injustice? Society has the knife and the pencil; that's the long and the short of it; and if people don't behave themselves they feel 'em both, and have to knock under. They're knifed first, and then caricatured—as the lions were. I can't see so much injustice myself. The world's a very pleasant place, if you'll only keep straight in it.'

And the Lady Joan pulled up the ruffles of old lace about her shapely throat, and glanced with a little grin at two big envelopes just come in: invitations to a ball at the Macscrips, and a dramatic representation at one of the minor Legations.

Etoile bade her good evening, and went away; left alone, she snapped her fingers at the deserted tea-table, jumped a step or two of a bolero, lit a cigar, and going to her chamber, got into a gown of loose eastern brocade with gold threads shining in it, twisted a string of amber beads round her head, and felt dressed appropriately for the guests she expected: Victor Louche, a second-class French dramatist, and M.

Ronsoulet, a very great sculptor, with Madame Pâtauge, who was Madame Ronsoulet *de facto*, but not *de jure*. They were tonic that she required after a Wednesday afternoon.

Society is like the porter of your Paris house. It frowns and bars the door, or rushes to bring all the keys to you, according as you have filled its pockets, or have left them empty. Lady Joan knew her porter.

She was not rich, indeed, not even with all the tea-cups and triptychs in the world; but then she knew how to be obliging; she would run up the back stairs to spare the porter any trouble about the front, and when the porter was grumpiest and sulkiest, would look up in his face and smile. No porter could long resist such conduct: not even the grim porteress that is called Mrs. Grundy.

But there is an amount of fatigue in being so very considerate to your porter, and Lady Joan always recompensed herself for her consideration with some little pleasant indulgence or other when the porter could not see through her keyhole.

In a sense, too, she liked the sharp and strong contrasts of her life. She loved the bisque soup after the barley broth; the caviare toast after the boiled sole with herbs. She liked keeping the goats and the sheep apart, and frisking up the wild glens with the one, and feeding in the fat pastures with the other. She liked lunching decorously off cold lamb with a clergyman's family, and talking of her dear friends the deans and the bishops, and she liked going to an artists' ball afterwards, and dancing and screaming till the daylight shone in at the windows. She liked driving staidly about with her great cousin of Hebrides with the white-wanded footmen of Hebrides behind, and she liked rattling the same nights about the streets, in the white Roman moonlight, in a hired cab, with her friends, singing choruses. She liked having a bevy of married and maiden dames to tea on a Tuesday afternoon, and enchanting them with old laces miraculously purchased, and pattern opinions miraculously fabricated; and she liked dining at home that evening with a few choice spirits who quoted Baudelaire in a haze of smoke, and

brought out the suggestive little statuettes, and held that none but fools could believe in any deity under any name, and quoted as their amatory gospel, '*l'amour, c'est la femme d'un autre.*'

On the whole, there was much wisdom in these ways of life. She saw life in all its aspects, and got credit from all its actors. And she seldom made mistakes in either the dull comedy or the gay one—except, indeed, when sometimes she talked too long to a cynic or met the eyes of a guileless woman.

At such times she would quail a little, and feel as though, despite all her cashmeres of conventionality and sables of content, some one had stript her naked in the full blaze of a noonday sun.

Her guests came in all together, laughing, happy, and goodhumoured, bringing with them much sparkle of fresh wit, and much smell of stale smoke, into the chambers where Mrs. Grundy had sat in august majesty but an hour before.

Victor Louche was a thin, sallow man, with a pungent tongue and a salacious humour, who

lived amongst actors and actresses, and was the life and soul of winter nights at Bignon's, and summer days at Etretat; Madame Pâtauge was a cheery soul, with much mirth, many anecdotes, and a repertory of all the liveliest songs of the last half-century, which she could still sing with power and zest, like the female Lablache that she was. Madame Pâtauge, originally the daughter of a house-porter in Paris, in days when Louis Philippe was king, knew her Paris as a child its nurse; she had gone on the stage of the Opéra Comique and been successful; she had married a journalist, who had beaten her and spent her money; she had consoled herself in the atelier of M. Ronsoulet, when he was unknown to fame, and had finally settled down permanently side by side with him when he became famous. She was a very big woman, with a very big voice, and M. Ronsoulet, who was a very little man, spent life much as a pigmy might do chained between the four paws of an elephant. But it was a good-natured elephant, and was totally unconscious that it crushed him; it thought, indeed, that carrying him about by its

trunk was a benefit; female elephants have these delusions.

She was an honest soul; she never sought to conceal what she had been, or what she was; when she had quarrelled with her husband she had abused him soundly, packed up her trunks, and departed from under his roof, with the frankest avowal of her intentions; she never concealed either the storms or the sunshine of her adventurous years; and she adored Ronsoulet with an adoration as big as her person. Nevertheless, a world which accepted the Lady Joan rejected this poor Madame, who was only Ronsoulet by courtesy. She was *mal vue* by Society, though she was a hundred times the better, truer, tenderer, and worthier woman. In fact, Society would have blushed to have been supposed to have even known the mere fact of her existence.

Lady Joan invited this trio of sorry sinners to dinner because the songs and anecdotes tickled her palate; because after Mrs. Grundy at tea she required mental tonic and refreshment; because Ronsoulet would make her own bust for nothing;

because Victor Louche had always known a good deal about her; because—there were fifty be-causes. Besides nobody knew of these bohemian banquets; her servants never talked; and if she were seen driving up to the little villa outside Porta Pia, where MM. Ronsoulet and Louche were living together, she only went to have her bust modelled—that was all.

'Do you speak to that creature?' said Society to her once when the good-tempered fat woman smiled, and nodded, and waved hands to her in delighted recognition across the crowd on the Pincio. Such contretemps will now and then occur to the most perfect diplomatists. And the Lady Joan replied with that frank regard which always told her intimate friends when she was lying with the most hardihood:—

'Well, you know, Mr. Challoner's always telling me I'm too good-natured to people. But I see her at Ronsoulet's studio. What can I do? One must just bow. I haven't the heart to cut people; I'm so weak about all that. Besides, you know, I have not the stiff ideas of other women; my poor mother was always so over-kind

to all artists. You see *we* are so well known. We can do things other folks can't. Nobody ever can say a word against us.'

So Society gave her much credit, alike for frankness, spirit, and propriety, a triad seldom allowed to exist in unison; and it was the general feeling in society that she was a very excellent young woman, and that it was high treason against her to suppose for a moment that she had any other attractions up at Fiordelisa than her bees and her beasts, her pigs and her poultry.

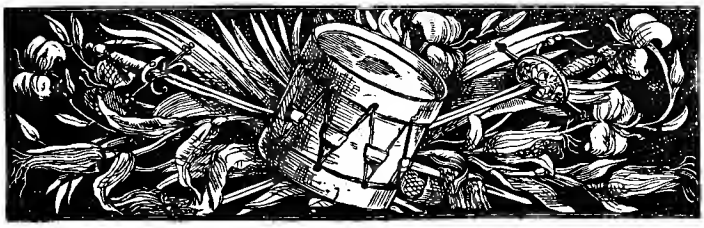
On the whole Lady Joan was as successful as that ingenious smuggler who traded in sheep, to run brandy ashore, and whose upper deck was crowded with innocent lambs, while the alcohol that cheated the revenues reposed cask against cask, all snug and unseen, underneath in the hold.

'Is it worth the trouble?' landsmen wonder, seeing the contraband sloops hover off the Spanish shores; 'is it worth so much calculation, so many risks, such constant oscillation between safety and ruin?' The contrabandists will tell

you that it is—that no money rings so cheerily as his, and no wine tastes so well.

Lady Joan had the same opinion.

Her's were only small gains like the smuggler's—a duchess's bow, an ambassadress's nod, cards to half a hundred houses, bankers' balls, clergymen's praises, American dinners—no more than the smuggler's dollars and tobacco. But then these were everything to her. Some desire the Apple of Hesperides, others only hunger for a sweet potato. Lady Joan was of this wise other section. And she bought her sweet potato in the right market, and ate it, and was happy.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE Scrope-Stair sisters made a Cerberus quite invaluable stationed for ever at the hall door of the Casa Challoner.

Cerberus of Hades was but a primitive and one-ideaed beast, whose sole office was to prevent miserable sinners from escaping their punishment. This Cerberus of society was a much more civilised being, and had the advanced views proper to its epoch—the epoch that has the Triangle instead of Troy. Cerberus, by alternately fawning and growling, induced Society to swallow the discrepancies of the Casa Challoner, as Cerberus itself had swallowed them. And it is only this first swallowing that is any trouble.

An impropriety to Society is like a fishbone in the human throat; fifty to one it will not slip down, but if once it pass all faces are calm; the fishbone is accepted in safety, and will be heard of no more. A little butter will be taken after it —nothing else.

Old Lord George had not utterly forgotten that he had once been a man of the world, though he had adopted an air of sleepy senility, which kept him out of rows and served him well; and old Sir George would watch the Lady Joan with a twinkle in his eye, and take her measure very correctly. He kept his lids half shut, and was very hard of hearing for the majority of the world, and could act a cross between King Lear and Poor Tom with an admirable skill when any quarrel was going on around him. But he had not forgotten that he had once been 'handsome Scrope' in the guard-room of St. James's, and he appraised his daughter's friend very neatly, and did not like his daughter's friendship. But what could he do all alone?

Middleway stayed up there; the pious Middleway, who talked of Providence as his own

Senior Partner, and of Paradise as a sort of bonus awarded for thrifty and timely insurance; Middleway dined at the Casa Challoner, and took his beloved girls to Fiordelisa, strong in their maiden innocence and their blond chignons. To be sure there was the Seventh Commandment printed amongst its brethren in any church where Middleway officiated; the Seventh Commandment in all the glaring outspokenness and culpable heedlessness of the feelings of Society, of which Moses, like too many other great writers, was guilty, and there were times when the excellent Middleway felt that the Decalogue ought, like the Decameron, to be edited in more polite language. But still, qualms or no qualms, Middleway lunched with Mrs. Henry V. Clams, and visited at Fiordelisa, and where Middleway, austere though charitable, boldly trod, how should poor old trembling Lord George dare to refuse to enter?

Besides, there was Marjory!

At the thought of Marjory all rebellion would die out of him; Marjory, with her pinched lips, her sharp voice, and her resolute

will, who, if he ventured to cross her wishes, would never let him have a brazier of charcoal, or a glass of whisky, or a banknote in his pocket ever again throughout his dreary days, but would remind him fifty times oftener than she did already, that if he had not been a spendthrift his daughters would not now have to trudge through mud and dust to copy gallery canvases and chapel frescoes. There was Middleway and there was Marjory—so old Lord George stifled his conscience, and let the mutton from Fiordelisa be set upon his table, and the eggs from Fiordelisa be broken into his sherry, and pretended to be dozing in the sun when the Lady Joan on the terrace of Fiordelisa called Ioris to her feet. He was a gentleman at heart, this poor worn-out, weary octogenarian; he had been an English soldier, and was still an English gentleman, and sometimes he felt ashamed. But he had grown timid with age, and his home was chill and dreary, and his daughters bade him obey, and he did obey, and Lady Joan sent him new eggs and fresh vegetables with the most grateful regularity. She had grown rather bored with

Cerberus, but Cerberus was still very useful to her, and she threw the admirable watch-dog the tit-bits she knew it desired.

She called them darling girls, though they were older than herself, had them always to her second-rate dinners, gave them patterns for gowns, took them to the theatres, sent them game and honey and wine, had them to stay at Fiordelisa, and above all, let Marjory feast her eyes on Ioris.

Poor Marjory, in the beginning of time when Lady Joan had first arrived from Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates, with her huntress's blood all on fire for want of something to kill, had not been a watch-dog, she had been a catspaw.

Before Lady Joan had reached the sublime heights of intrepidity from which she now invited the Church to lunch up at Fiordelisa, whilst she was still under that certain chill and awe of that vision of the British Bona Dea which had loomed before her on her landing at Brindisi, she had deemed it worth while to be prudent.

In pursuit of prudence she had bade Ioris pay

a semblance of court to her dear friend Marjory, and took Marjory about with her conspicuously. Ioris laughed, pitied himself, and obeyed. He played his part gracefully in the meaningless comedy, and its victim based upon it her wildest hopes, as baseless as they were wild. When she perceived that she had been but fooled—used as the mere screen of another's convenience—the passion of that fading hope survived the death of hope. She consumed her heart in rage and misery, but consumed it in silence. To break with the Casa Challoner would have been to lose all sight of Ioris; she continued to kiss her friend in public and private, and nurtured her unspoken passion in her breast, feeding it hungrily on every look and tone and gesture of her friend's lover. She saw what her friend did not see; she foresaw the time when the proverb would hold good that too much tying loosens. She marked her friend's mistakes, and gauged the power of her friend's tyranny, she saw when the chain was strained, and laid in wait for some dim future, as the grey adder hides under the stone.

She loved him with the terrible love of the woman who hungers for a life that will no more come to her than the silver moon in summer will come to a child's cries; who knows that his hours, his thoughts, his senses, are all another's and will never be hers, yet dreams of some day when disaster or disappointment may drag him down within her grasp, and whispers in the hush of the night to her own sick soul—'Who knows, who knows?'

The comedy had long ceased to be played and the years had gone by since then, but the desire of the moth for the star still burnt on, and the gentle grace, the tender familiarity, the kindly courtesy of his ways with women fed the smouldering fire with every unthinking action; she knew that it was useless, hopeless, rootless, but still, in the dreary routine and repression of her days, she hugged closer this one sweetness: only to see him, hear him, be where he was, this she deemed better than nought; she fought so firmly for the Temple of All the Virtues because on its altars her own hopes smouldered, and when she defended the innocence of its rites

there was so robust a ring of sincerity in her voice because it hurt her so fiercely to think of those long amorous summers, which the nightingales of Fiordelisa hymned.

Lady Joan knew her folly well enough, and gleefully grinned over it in secret, and even approved of it. It was useful to her, the one supreme test-weight by which the Lady Joan balanced all things.

'If the poor ass like to fret herself to fiddle-strings after Io—let her,' said the Lady Joan in her thoughts; and Lady Joan in public kissed her with effusion, before a dozen spinsters, and took her often to the theatres, and said to everybody, 'If Io would only be persuaded to marry that dear darling good girl!—but he won't hear of it, you know—such a pity—such friends as we all are, it would be delightful!'

Meantime, Marjory Scrope grew passive, if not resigned, as the seasons swept on, and accepted the reign of the Lady Joan as inevitable, and would have been even willing to make common cause with her against any invader of her sovereignty; and, sharp of eye and ear, saw many a sign

that escaped the happy and blind vanity of her friend: heard many a yawn, detected many a gesture of weariness and impatience, and had almost ceased to be jealous of what she saw had to him become but a habit. But at any gleam of a fresh interest, any glance of a new thought for him, she sprang up as a snake springs—not the Lady Joan herself could ever have been as swift to see it, as ferocious to resent it, as she was.

And, with the prescience of an unerring way, the hatred of Marjory Scrope-Stairs had darted down and fastened on Etoile.

Marjory, indeed, was hardly used. Jacob for Rachel had not served more devotedly than she for six years had served the Lady Joan for the wage of proximity to Ioris. She had toiled early and late; she had copied old frescoes and let the Lady Joan sell them; she had worked chairs and cushions, and finished lace that her friend had begun and got tired of; she had never minded being asked at the eleventh hour to fill up a place at a dinner, unexpectedly left vacant; she had trudged through sludge and sleet on bitter winter days, to ransack curiosity barrows

for the Casa Challoner; and, finally, she had gone about in society armed *cap-à-pie* in defence of that Temple of all the Virtues, and made herself generally ridiculous with a stubbornness and a heroism worthy of a far better cause. She had led a hard, dull, joyless life. She had been a watch-dog, and been bound to take blows and be out in all weathers; she had been a screen and had borne all the brunt of the fire, and been pushed aside when not wanted; she had been a catspaw, and was left with burnt fingers and sore heart out in the cold whilst her clever friend gleefully munched the fruit. She had been hardly dealt with for six mortal years; but she had been able to bear it all for sake of that baseless, shapeless, yet inextinguishable hope which had sustained her. She had grown used, with the dull pain of an old half-healed wound, to seeing the supremacy of the Lady Joan.

But now!—She hated the new-comer with that deadly hatred which has no pity as it has no parallel; the hatred of an obscure and discontented woman for the woman who is eminent and adored.

Etoile herself never thought about her at all, save to feel compassion for her vaguely as the slavey of Society, and the shadow of the Lady Joan. But Marjory Scrope thought of her from morn till night, watched her gestures, studied her every word, hated her for the very *frou-frou* of her skirts, the mere silent softness of her sweeping velvets; hated her beyond all for the look that the eyes of Ioris gained whenever they gazed on her; and in the stillness of the nights dreamed of her, and waking, muttered, 'I have borne enough—never will I bear *that*!—never, never, never!'

'Take the watering-pot,' had said that wise woman of the world, Lady Cardiff.

Perhaps, if Etoile had taken the watering-pot—if she had drunk tea at the Scrope-Stairs, given the Scrope-Stairs a few pretty things, praised the Scrope-Stair drawings, and bought a water-colour of the School of Athens—even this sandstorm of envy and hatred might have been allayed. But that was not her way.

'My dear, you never seem to fear the mob,' said Lady Cardiff. 'It is just the mob that

builds up guillotines; and the woman who has genius is just Marie Antoinette to it, "the accursed proud Austrian"—and the mob howls till the axe falls.'

No doubt it was a true exordium: but Etoile feared the mob no more than did the daughter of Maria Theresa.

This night, when the Lady Joan sternly bade her knight attend the knightless damsels to their home, Ioris obeyed. He was aware of the hopeless passion he had long before inspired, and pitied the woman who felt it, and was friends with her in the same kindly, courtly, gentle spirit with which he took off his hat to the old orange woman at the corner, and asked the cobbler's wife in the cellar how her rheumatism fared. It was tiresome to him to go out of his way in the damp chilly night, with the snow beginning to fall, to escort Cerberus whom his mistress had chosen for the nonce to dress up as a Una, without a lion. But he did the behest chivalrously, and went with the sisters gaily and courteously to their dull, old, dark, long palace down by the Forum Trajano, and having discharged his duty,

thought that he had justly earned a little recreation.

Ioris, with people he disliked, was apt to pour out on them a graceful effusion which they took for cordiality and regard. They were never more mistaken in their lives. To women who wearied him, to men he mistrusted, to enemies always, and to strangers generally, Ioris was courtier enough by habit, and meridional enough in nature, to be unrelaxing in courtesy, and ardent in protestation; amiability is the armour of the South, as much as rudeness is of the North.

In the dusk on the staircase that night, Ioris as he had escorted Cerberus had seen a jewel shining on the stone, had stooped for it, and recognised a black onyx medallion, with a monogram in pearls, which he remembered seeing once about the throat of Etoile. He did not send it upstairs to her by the servant, as he might have done, since he had left her sitting by the fire, but said nothing of it to his companions, and slipped it into his pocket. His escort ended, and the sisters safe at home, he went to his own home, dined hastily, and calling about eight

o'clock at the house on the Monte Cavallo, sent to know if the Comtesse d'Avesnes would receive him.

Etoile, her own brief dinner ended, was sitting in a low chair by the hearth, with great Tsar at her feet, looking over some old prints, Marcantonios amidst them, which she had bought that morning.

The room was large, but warm; big bowls of flowers stood on the marble tables; old tapestries and embroideries were scattered about, there were sketches here and there; the hearth was wide and open; oak logs were burning on it, and their flame shone red on the *giallo antico* of its huge carved chimneypiece; a marble copy of the Belvedere Mercury which she had bought stood near, with a cluster of rose-red azaleas in vases around it; and a bronze of the Vatican Jove was half-hidden in white camellias. A certain sense of home fell on Ioris as he entered —a sense that never touched him in his own lonely house or within the chambers of the Casa Challoner.

Etoile, who was dressed in white stuffs, that fell

softly about her, and had a knot of geranium at her throat, turned, with a smile, as she saw him.

'Is it anything very urgent? Has Lady Joan found a fault in the Venetian costume?'

A shadow passed over his mobile face at the name; he came forward and dropped on one knee by the hearth.

'Nothing urgent; and perhaps you will rebuke me for an intrusive impertinence. I had the fortune to find this to-night, and I could not resist restoring it into your own hands.'

She gave a cry of pleasure.

'Oh, that is very good of you. My dear locket! I had just sent to advertise for it. You shall look in it for your reward.'

'May I indeed?'

She pressed the secret spring for him, and he saw the portrait of Dorotea Coronis.

His heart beat with a quick relief. He had expected to see some face of his own sex.

'The Duchesse Santorin is very happy to have such a friend,' he said gravely.

'But you barely look at it; there is no more beautiful face in Europe.'

I do not care to look at it,' said Ioris, and his soft eyes gazed at her own face.

Etoile felt her cheek grow warm—she could not tell why—and she drew a little away.

'Make Tsar move farther—he has very bad manners—and rise up, Prince Ioris. There is a pleasant chair there.'

'Will you not call me Io? Everyone does.'

'I do not care to do what everyone does,' she answered him, a little impatiently. She seemed to hear the 'Io! Io!' of Lady Joan's imperious demands ringing loudly over hill and vale by the banks of the Almo.

He caressed Tsar, and sank into the chair near her, within the warmth of the hearth.

'You are all alone? You are going to spend your evening alone?'

She smiled.

'"Never less alone than when alone." It is fortunate for me that I feel so, for I have always been left very much to myself.'

'But surely——'

'You mean I might be out somewhere to-night? Oh, yes: and any other nights. But I do

not care very much for society—not even for that of Paris. In my own house there I receive a good deal: that I like; but society is monotonous: it has no infinite variety, as study has and art. Besides, I think the artist, like the saint, should keep himself "unspotted from the world" as far as possible. It only dims our sight and dwarfs our aims.'

'And you are not very strong in health, I fear.'

'They say so. Perhaps I have tried to do too much too early.'

'The perfect fruit and flower have been too much for the young tree that bore them.'

'Perfect! Ah, if you could only know how ill-content I am with all that men call great in what I do; how poor and pale the best is beside the visions that I see!'

'That of course. What Raffaelle has left us must be to the glories he imagined as the weaver's dye to the sunset's fires. Tell me—you have been in Rome before?'

'Never. I studied in Belgium and in Paris—nowhere else; but to be taught by Istrion was

almost an atonement for the loss of Rome. But it is because I lost Rome in my student days that I cannot endure to waste any hours here in the mere distractions of Society which I can have anywhere else. In your city it is so easy to "be with the immortals." I wander in your wonderful haunted places as long as it is light, and then when evening comes on I am tired.'

'You do wisely for yourself—though cruelly to others.'

'Ah, pray do not make me compliments: I dislike them. We are not in Society now; we can be natural.'

'You always doubt my sincerity.'

'No, not always. Tsar would not like you so well if you could not be true sometimes.'

Ioris lifted up the noble head of the dog and kissed him.

'I think I am always true—except when *she* makes me false,' he murmured as he stooped to the hound. 'Madame, tell me more of yourself. You cannot think what interest it has for me. Nay, I am saying no flattery now, but the simplest fact. When the world says "Etoile"

everyone wonders; I have wondered with the rest. Do not be angered.'

'Why should I be? I will tell you anything you like. Not that there is much to tell. My years are written on my panels and canvases. I have lived between the studio and the open air.'

There was something dreamy and familiar in the warm, wood-scented air, the mellow light, the bright hearth, the shadowy, fragrant chamber. It seemed to Ioris that he had been there all his life watching the glow from the fire fall on the white folds of her dress and finding out the red geraniums at her throat; whilst little by little, in the easy communicativeness of fireside talk, the various changes of her life, with its ambitions and its fruitions, passed before him, and her words built up to his fancy the little village on the green Meuse waters and the old house by the gardens of the Luxembourg.

Etoile very seldom spoke of herself.

She had grown to see that no one ever believed a word she said; so silence had become a habit with her.

What they expected she did not know; nor, perhaps, did they any better. But the mere truth never had a chance of being credited. It never has.

'Truth is a gem that loves the deep' applies to truth metaphysical, historical, philosophical. But truth personal is rather a flower like the briar rose, too homely, too simple, and too thorny for men to care to gather it. They like a lie, which, like the barometrical flower, will change its colour half a dozen times a day.

With Ioris she had a different feeling. She was willing to talk to him, glad to take him back with her in fancy to her childish days. He listened with that soft, mute attention, that homage of scarce-broken silence, which his gaze made more eloquent than the most eager words of other men. The firelight shone on his delicate dark head; his eyes were dreamy, musing, tender. The moments sped swiftly away and became hours. At last he drew a deep breath, as of a man who casts off a burden of dread.

'And amidst it all—you have never loved!'

'Loved!' echoed Etoile, in a vague, startled

sort of surprise. Her face grew warm; she felt troubled, she could not have told why.

'Is it true?' he persisted. 'It is true, is it not, you have never loved anyone?'

Etoile bent forward and put back a burning picce of wood that had fallen too far. As she did so one of the geranium flowers fell out from amongst the blossoms at her throat. He caught it from the fire.

'Answer me,' he said eagerly. 'Is it true?'

'Certainly true—yes. But I do not know why——'

He put the scarlet flower in his breast.

'Why I have the daring to ask you so personal a question? Only to ask it seems a profanation, and I need not have asked it—for I knew——'

'What can you mean? What can you know?'

'I knew that it was so before you spoke a word. The first night I saw you I said in my thoughts, "That woman has no past;" for a woman who has had no passion has no past, no more than those flowers, born to-day, that are

at your breast. Then I studied those scattered poems that are signed "Etoile," and I was yet more sure. You write of love from without, not from within. It is a thing you have read of, dreamed of, built up to yourself in fancy, but have not felt. You theorise on it externally, as you might of life in some far planet more beautiful than earth. But love, you know—no, you do not know—is a fiercer, fonder, ay, and perhaps a grosser and viler thing than you have ever been touched by. You have said to yourself, "I shall love like that some day." You have not said to yourself, "I loved like that in a day that is dead." Now, between those two there is such a gulf—such an abyss—such a sea of flame! And when you have crossed that gulf you will not look at us all any longer with those clear, candid, wondering eyes, as if you had strayed down out of a better world than ours. No; then you will only look back, and you will be no longer pure of heart, as you are now. Tell me: am I not right?'

A flush went over her face. He was half-leaning, half-kneeling by her; his eyes watched

her with a dreamy pleasure in them, half-sensual, half-spiritual.

He was utterly in earnest as he spoke; he meant truly what he uttered; but he was a master in the power of casting sweet trouble into a woman's soul, and there was an added pleasure to him when the soul was deep and calm like a lake and his was the first hand to drop either a pearl or a stone into its depths.

'Am I not right?' he murmured softly.

She pushed her hair back from her forehead a little wearily and with a sense of confusion.

'Yes—oh, yes,' she answered him, 'I suppose a woman's life without love is incomplete. I suppose I only sleep; but I can care for no one—in that way. Art alone moves me.'

He had risen as he had spoken last; and now, bending downward with exquisite grace, he touched her hand with his lips as softly as a bird's wing might brush a rose in passing.

'Happy he for whom you shall awake,' he murmured as he stooped.

Then he glanced at the clock, bowed low, caressed the dog, and went.

The clock-hands stood at eleven.

Etoile sat without moving as he had left her gazing into the fire. A nameless emotion stirred within her and made her pulse thrill. A troubled pain, that yet was not pain at all was on her. 'What have I missed?' she wondered; and then her face grew warm again, and she rose with a restless impatience of herself, not understanding what ailed her.

Meanwhile Ioris passed out into the moonlit night, which was cold and wet, flinging his furs about him in the teeth of the north wind, and, with the geranium flower hidden in his breast, mounted the staircase of the Casa Challoner.

At the Casa Challoner the dinner had been gay, but Lady Joan had been gloomy.

In vain did Victor Louche tell his best stories, and Madame Pâturge cap them with still better; in vain did both of them sing the funniest and naughtiest songs that theatres and *cafés-chantants* had ever rung with; in vain did they disport themselves and earn their truffles and their wine and their entrance into the Temple of All the Virtues—in vain: the brow

of the Lady Joan was dark, her high spirits had departed, and her eyes were as two scimetars flashing ominously in moonlight.

Victor Louche, innocent or malicious, called out from the piano at eleven o'clock, 'Ah, *pardieu*! where is Prince Io? I thought I missed something familiar from the *menu*.'

The cheery Pâturge from a capacious chair sent out a cone of tobacco-smoke.

'Ah, yes, where is Prince Charming? It seemed to me there was something wanting. You have never quarrelled with him, *ma mie*? He is too delightful. Such manners! Ah!'

'Quarrel!' said the Lady scornfully. 'Who *could* quarrel with Io? Quarrel with a bean-stalk! That's more character than he has.'

'Jealous: who of, I wonder?' thought the astute Victor, with a crash of the chords.

Mr. Challoner was, as usual, in his own sanctum, with the *Times* and the Share-list.

Madame Pâturge looked across at Monsieur Ronsoulet and winked; but the wink was lost on him: he was thinking of his statue of Palestrina for the new Opera-house, and a little of

the *châteaubriand* at dinner. He roused himself slowly to what they were talking about.

'To be sure, where is Ioris?' he muttered. 'I never dined here without him before. And there is no one in Europe with a truer or more delicate instinct for the arts. Where is he?'

'I expected him to dinner,' said Lady Joan sulkily. When she was out of temper she sometimes told the truth.

The Turkish curtains were at that moment put aside, and through the doorway Ioris entered, kissed Madame Pâturge's hands with gay gallantry, saluted Ronsoulet with reverential friendship, and accosted Victor Louche with a graceful compliment on his last comedy.

'Such perfect manners, *ma mie*. You will never change for the better,' said Madame Pâturge in a low tone to her hostess, who, however, did not even hear, but said roughly and curtly to the offender:

'Where have you been?'

'I have dined at home. I found a mass of correspondence.'

'I told you to go with the Stairs.'

'I accompanied those amiable sisters.'

'Well, why didn't you come straight back here?'

'I remembered orders I had to give Giannino at home. I knew you could not miss me—you would be too well amused.'

'You've been writing all the evening?'

'Yes.'

The eyes of Ioris began to grow a little argry under their long lashes. Victor Louche, who feared a scene, began to sing '*Ça me chatouille dans le nez.*'

Madame Pâturge nudged her hostess.

'Perhaps he has been playing at the club, and lost money?'

'Io never plays,' said the Lady Joan savagely.

There was an awkward silence.

Victor Louche sang very loud and made a great noise with the pedals. Ioris crossed over to M. Ronsoulet.

'*Caro maestro*, how goes the Palestrina?'

'The beanstalk won't bend for ever,' thought Madame Pâturge in her capacious chair.

Fortunately for the preservation of peace there then entered Mimo and Trillo and a youth of three-and-twenty, Guido Serravalle, who sang a fine second to her favourite ritornello.

Trillo brought her word of an Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts who was coming from Petersburg and would buy a great deal; Mimo of an order that Lord Norwich had given him to find an altar-screen, *trecento*, if possible; and Guido Serravalle brought her a new song and an old lute, inlaid with ivory and silver, as a present. They sufficed to avert the thunders of her wrath; but, even as she hastily reckoned that the lute was certainly worth three or four hundred francs and smiled on the donor, her brow was still dark and her face was still sullen.

The sagacious Madame Pâturge, from her chair blowing clouds of cigarette smoke about her head, watched and winked once more to the slumbering Ronsoulet.

'She is jealous, and he is not. No, he does not even resent that lute; he is only glad that the lute spares him a scene. Ah! there is a storm in the air. I should like to see it break.'

But the sagacious Pâturge had not that pleasure—Ioris did not wait for it.

He left the house with Victor Louche, and left the old ivory lute on his mistress's knee, and Guido Serravalle kneeling before her to tune it, with Mimo and Trillo on either side of her, like her tutelary twin deities as they were.

'Ronsoulet,' said Madame Pâturge as they went home, 'that will not last very long.'

'Will it not, my dear?' said Ronsoulet; and he sighed, for experience had taught him that liberty was hard to obtain.

The next morning, while the day was still young, Ioris, in his own little room, taking his coffee, was confronted by an imperious and furious woman. A scene was his fate.

What did he mean? How dared he? Where had he been? What could he say?

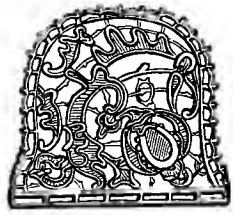
The whirlwind broke over his head. The fierce grey eyes flashed like steel. The storm had lost nothing of its violence by having been pent up till noon.

Irritated, annoyed, deafened, surprised, exas-

perated, he sought refuge in an untruth: he affected jealousy of the old ivory lute.

It was a lie, but it imposed on her. It calmed the troubled waters of her soul. She believed; and believing, consented to be pacified.

So blinded by her credulous vanity was she, that she omitted to notice that all the while he never told her where his evening had been spent.



CHAPTER XVII.

'He was jealous of poor little Guido!' thought Lady Joan, with a flash of delight and amusement, an hour after the tempest, as she glanced in the mirror to see if her brow were smooth again and her dress uncrumpled, and hastened from the house of Ioris.

On the threshold, with whom should an unkind fate bring her sharply in contact but Lord and Lady Norwich, ponderous and solemn, their footman behind them, walking feebly down the street to their carriage! They had been to see a neighbouring church which boasted a famous fresco.

Lord and Lady Norwich looked a little stiff;

Lady Joan for the moment a little blank. But it was just one of those moments which, like the meetings at the Paris cafés when without her bib-and tucker, tested her *savoir-faire*, and never found her wanting.

'Oh, dear Lady Norwich,' she cried with rapture, 'what a fortunate moment to meet you! This is Io's house. You know Io's house? Mr. Challoner brought you the other day to see his tapestries, didn't he?' (Lord and Lady Norwich, still stiffly, assented.) 'How I do wish you would come in again now! Will you come in again now? I've just been to see such a lovely old Francia he has found out right away in the mountains. It belongs to a poor old priest, a vicar of a miserable village, who is really almost starving, and never knew the worth of it till Io told him. Mr. Challoner and I have been enchanted with the picture. I'm afraid Robert's just gone, and Io was already out, but I could show you this Francia if you would not mind coming up stairs. You know I do as I like here. Poor dear Io! he's just like my brother. Could you spare me five minutes?'

Lord and Lady Norwich were thawing: they

hesitated, mumbled that it was cold, but finally yielded; she was so solicitous and so deferential that they consented to enter the house and to carry their venerable persons and their unimpeachable respectability and dignity up the staircase to see the Francia, which was placed alone in its glory on an old oak easel in one of the entrance-chambers.

'Very fine; really very fine,' said Lord Norwich, and sat down before it.

The Francia was a real Francia; it had been in the family of Ioris for as many centuries as have gone by since the tender old painter looked with wet eyes on Raffaelle's panel that made him ashamed of the labours of his own long lifetime. There was no doubt about the Francia, which was a treasure and favourite with Ioris; and the slow, torpid heart of Lord Norwich began to quicken with longing for it.

'Wasted in a village presbytery—dear me! dear me!' he said, and shook his head. He was an honourable man; he said straight out that he would give the needy priest the just price for it, and named a large sum.

'I'm sure Io can get it for you for that,' said the Lady Joan. 'I'm so sorry Io's not home now. He was already gone out when I came in first. But I'll tell him, and let you know this evening for certain.'

'Perhaps he may wish to buy it himself?' said Lord Norwich—a scrupulous man, very delicate and hesitating under his pomposity.

Lady Joan laughed.

'Poor dear Io! *Buy* it! He'll have to sell his own pictures more likely, I'm afraid. You know he's so poor, though we try to keep things straight for him in the country. No, he let it hang here on the chance of finding a purchaser for the poor old *vicario*. He'll be so delighted you have seen and fancied it. Io loves to do good. Dear Lady Norwich, are you cold on this marble floor?'

Lady Norwich began to think the rooms were cold: if Lord Norwich had seen enough of the picture she wished to go. This was precisely what Lady Joan wanted her to do. She was afraid every moment that Ioris would come out of his own little room, and she had no means of

signalling to him to stay there shut up; and though of course she could readily have explained his appearance on some hypothesis or another, still it was better to avoid it. So she suggested that the apartment was cold.

'Io is so little at home, you know; he is so much with us,' she said frankly.

'As if she *would* say that, if there were anything between them!' thought Lady Norwich, and commented on the speech to this effect afterwards to her friends. So Lady Joan piloted them in safety down stairs, and was offered a seat in their carriage, and took it, and drove home to luncheon with these great and excellent people; and having begun the morning with a scene, ended it with a success, like the truly clever woman she was.

'Not like to sell the Francia, Io!' she screamed later in the day. 'But you must sell it—you shall sell it. If I hadn't sold it I should have been compromised for life. Would you dare to compromise *me* by telling these old asses the picture is yours?'

A gentleman cannot compromise a woman,

even if she has just made him a stormy scene in an unasked visit to his own house. So Ioris, with an impatient and embittered heart, saw his Francia transferred to the Norwich collection.

The purchase-money was a large sum indeed.

'It will set your poor priest at ease for his life, I hope,' said the kindly stupid purchaser, who liked to think people were comfortable through his means.

Ioris bowed in silence.

There was no poor priest to have the purchase-money; but the Lady Joan shortly afterwards bought herself a *rivière* of emeralds that was going cheap, and, from the Chemnitz sales, an old cabinet of the first matchless Boule.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The gardens of the Colonna Palace are amongst the most charming things of Rome. When the iron gate clangs behind you and you climb the ilex-walk to them you will ten to one be all alone. The gardens are just such gardens as Horace and Virgil used to move in; you sit under the shattered pine planted to mark Rienzi's death, and all the temples and towers of the immortal city lie beneath, and the pile of the Capitol soars upward near you, from the mass of roofs, like a cliff from out the sea; the pigeons pace to and fro, the ducks push their flat beaks amongst the grass, swallows skim by, oranges drop, the sound of the many trickling

streams and fountains blends with the subdued murmur of the streets far down below. The world holds few sweeter or nobler places to dream in than these gardens of Rienzi's foes.

Etoile found them out, and often went across the piazza to them in the early morning or at the decline of day, with the great dog Tsar.

One afternoon, having passed all the morning in the Vatican galleries with Princess Vera, she entered the gardens to sit and watch the sun sink to his setting. As she sat there, with volumes of Giusti and of Leopardi on her lap, at which she had not even looked, Tsar rose and moved his tail in animated welcome. She glanced downward through the shelving descent of ilex and orange leaves, and saw coming across from the palace, by the little bridge that crosses the street, the figure of Ioris.

Tsar ran headlong down the winding walks and steps to meet him. He came up, caressing the dog, and approached her with uncovered head.

'I saw you from the gallery of the palace; I could not resist ascending. I saw you were

looking more at Rome than at your books. You love my city?'

'Ah, what a commonplace! That is only to say that I am not quite soulless.'

'Few care for Rome as you do.'

'No? To be sure Lady Joan says that it is as dirty as Cairo, as dear as Trouville, as ugly as Brighton, and as great an imposture as Athens. Tastes differ.'

He gave an impatient gesture.

'Why must you always speak of *her*? Let me forget that she exists for a moment.'

Etoile looked at him a moment, then looked away.

'Do not say those things to me. They are not loyal.'

'Loyal! Do slaves give loyalty? You have called me a slave.'

She was silent.

'Can loyalty be enforced by cudgels and chains? She thinks it can, but it cannot.'

'Tell her so, then: not me.'

Ioris sighed impatiently.

'Tell her! How little you know her!' he

muttered. He thought of the fierce storms, the violent reproaches, the tempestuous outbursts which avenged the slightest opposition to his tyrant's will.

All that men most dread, and which they have concentrated in the one all-eloquent word a 'scene,' she could pour out upon his head in any fatal hour that her whim was crossed or wrath excited.

A woman's violence is a mighty power; before it, reason recoils unnerved, justice quails appalled, and peace perishes like a burnt-up scroll; it is a sand-storm, before which courage can do but little: the bravest man can but fall on his face and let it rage on above him.

He walked to and fro, a moment or two, on the level path of the upper terrace; then very wearily rested his elbows on the wall and leaned there near her where she sat.

It was a beautiful afternoon; the sun was still above the dusky lines of the pines of Monte Mario, far away in front, and the warm light tinted the soft, clear olive of his cheek and the delicate, proud outlines of his face.

His face and figure lent themselves to the beauty of any scene. Standing on a reaped field, against the bare poles of the maize, in his white linen dress, with the warm sun about him, he had a poetic, supple, picturesque grace that Leopold Robert would have loved to perpetuate in a Roman sketch; standing in a crowded presence-chamber, with orders hanging to his coat and a sea of court ladies' laces, and feathers, and diamonds about him, in the waxlight, he had a grave, meditative dignity of beauty that Vandyck would have liked to render in a portrait which should have all the lordly sadness of his Charles Stuart in it.

With Ioris all this was quite unconscious: hence its charm. Nature had made him so: that was all. But his personal graces gave him an irresistible sway over women. This kind of power to charm is like a magician's gift.

Women shall honour great ability, shall behold true manliness, shall be worshipped with knightly reverence, shall be assailed by all the splendour of intellect, shall be wooed with all daring and all humility, and yet shall remain

cold, and as untouched, as marble in the quarry. And then there shall come one who has this magic gift—this wand that wakes the sleeping senses, this rose that slipped into the bosom, banishes all peace, this power of love incarnated, —and though the magician be faithless as the wind, and rootless as the windborn flower, yet in him alone for ever shall be her heaven and her hell.

'What a life is mine!' he said impetuously now, after a long silence. 'The life of a lackey! You described it well that day at Fiordelisa. No will of my own; no time of my own; ordered here, ordered there; dragging through the same endless and joyless routine. The lackey has more liberty than I, for he at least stipulates for some few hours of freedom. What future can I look forward to? I dare not look forward; a dead blank faces me—faces me everywhere. With no home, with no interest, with no children, with no hope, is it worth while living? At times I envy the very mules that creep past me with their loads: they are less sensible of the weight they bear than I am.'

Etoile looked at him and felt a pang at her own heart: half of pity, half of pain. She could not doubt the sincerity of this passionate lament.

'But your friendship——' she murmured, and then paused, with the colour in her face.

It was not friendship that thus dragged upon his life. She felt ashamed to speak the sorry lie Society allows and loves.

Ioris, with one of his swift changes of mood, and uneasily conscious that he had betrayed himself too far, turned and laughed carelessly.

'Friendship! Ah! yes. Friendship means anything—everything—from deadliest hate and hottest love downward to the zero of complete indifference! There is only Tsar, I think, who really gives one the honest friendship of a bygone day.'

He drew the dog to him and caressed him, and sank down on the bench beside her, and talked of Leopardi, whom he had known when he himself had been a little child, and together they watched the pile of the Capitol grow dark and the sun descend behind the purples of the

pines; together they left the gardens, that grew drear and cold when once the sun had set, and passed across the square in the fleeting twilight.

At her door he bade her adieu, and with a heavy heart and a reluctant step went slowly back to the house which stood to him in the stead of home—a bastard home, warmed with the dull fires of a worn-out passion; he felt a great reluctance to enter, an utter weariness of all he would encounter.

Day after day, night after night, the comedy was always the same. The curt command, the hard contempt, the commercial discussion, the sensual gaze, the trite caress, the hollow ecstasy —he knew them all, one after another, so well— so horribly well. His heart failed him as he mounted the long stone staircase and entered the familiar atmosphere, haunted with stale smoke and stirred by the twang of the mandoline.

He hated the scent; he hated the sounds. They were all fraught to him with the sickliness of an enforced habit, of a perpetual repetition. Shining eyes flashing through tobacco-mist over

a ribboned guitar may be intoxicating for six hours, six weeks, even six months. But for six years! . . .

In six years the laugh palls, the songs jar, the eyes repel.

A sense of dulness and jaded effort fell on him always now whenever he crossed the threshold of that too terribly well-known room. The deadly apathy of a familiarity that is not hallowed by any sense of sanctity or sweetness fell on him, heavy as lead, whenever he entered her dwelling. He knew all that would be said and done, all that would be expected and exacted; it had no more interest for him than a comedy that has run three hundred nights has for the stall-keepers.

A woman need never dread the fiercest quarrel with her lover; the tempest may bring sweeter weather than any it broke up, and after the thunder the singing of birds will sound lovelier than before. Anger will not extinguish love, nor will scorn trample it dead; jealousy will fan its fires, and offences against it may but fasten closer its fetters that it adores beyond

all liberty. But when love dies of a worn-out familiarity it perishes for ever and aye.

Jaded, disenchanted, wearied, indifferent, the tired passion expires of sheer listlessness and contemptuous disillusion.

The death is slow and unperceived, but it is sure; and it is a death that has no resurrection.

This was how the passion which the Lady Joan desired to cudgel into immortality, was dying now.

When he entered the Turkish room this afternoon he found her the centre of an adoring circle of half a dozen youths, with the white-haired Silverly Bell and the very dear old Mimo as more solid ballast. She was surrounded by sketches of costumes, Eastern stuffs, strings of sequins, and damascened weapons, and was discussing her own and her companions' attire at a fancy ball to be given by the Echéances.

'How late you are, Io! Where have you been all this time?' she said in greeting, a heavy frown upon her brows.

'With the King of Denmark,' answered Ioris.

'*What?* Why, Almeria's in attendance on him.'

'Almeria is indisposed. They sent for me.'

Lady Joan looked at him sharply. She had a vague suspicion that there was something withheld from her.

'Where did the king go?' she pursued, being possessed with the common feminine belief that catechisms produce truth as their results.

'To the galleries,' answered Ioris.

'Will he buy while he's here?' said the Lady Joan, her thoughts reverting to business and her eyes to Burletta.

Ioris shrugged his shoulders.

'I really cannot say'

Then he took up the day's *Fanfulla* and sat down near the window, whilst she returned to her costumes and her courtiers, and put on her yashmaks and rattled her tambourines, and screamed at the youths' jokes and smiled on their homage, and petted her dear old friends Silverly and Mimo so cleverly that neither was envious of the other.

'How different it is with her!' he mused, with a sigh, to himself.

Etoile had become 'her' in his thoughts.

'You're as grave as an owl, Io,' cried the Lady Joan, snapping her fingers in his face as six o'clock sounded, and she dismissed her slaves, and threw the windows open to let the cigar smoke out, since the Dean of St. Edmund's and the Lady Barbara, his wife, were going to dine with her, and other eminent respectabilities were to meet them; and her well-trained servant was already clearing away the French songs, and the cigar-ash, and the costumes, and the tambourines, and laying out in their stead grave English journals and reports of Academies of Art and Science.

She was careful to give many dinners, and good ones. She knew that money laid out on plovers' eggs and truffles, green peas in winter, and salmon from the North, sherries from the Xeres plains, and clarets from the Garonne's banks, will bring forth high interest in the shape of much long-suffering from a propitiated, and by consequence pardoning, Society.

She had never read the *Satyricon*, and perhaps never heard of it, but she acted on the

principle inculcated by the priestess Ænothea. In this age, as in that, two broad gold pieces, provided they be big enough, will buy the right to kill the sacred goose of the temple and even to cook it too.

The world is like aged Ænothea.

'Slay the divine bird! oh, vilest sinner!' she cried, and banged her trencher down in ruthless rain of blows; but, softening at the sight of a well-filled hand, she relented. 'Nay, sweet youth, it was but in love and fear for thee I scolded. Nay, I promise thee, surely it shall be known to none. And since the bird is dead it were of no avail to avenge it; I will strip it in thine honour, and we will make merry over its baked meats!'

Society has not changed much since the *Satyricon*. It has invented prettier names for the old vices—that is all.

Ioris now moved from her touch with that petulance which took in him the charm of a woman's grace and a woman's waywardness.

'*Carissima mia!* One does not feel flattered when you take such ardent interest in young lads

of twenty that can warble a café ballad; and, as you only reproach me when I come here, and amuse yourself with others, why should I endeavour to be anything but grave?'

She did not know the secret of the impatience which moved him, the comparison with the thoughts and ways of another woman that he instituted to her own loss in his own meditations. She believed that he was angered at her attention to the young men, as he had been angry at the ivory lute, and such anger argued jealousy, and jealousy had been very quiet in him for some years. She was delighted at its revival.

'What a goose you are! Go home and dress,' she cried gaily to him as she disappeared into her own chamber. He caught her hand and detained her a moment.

'Who dines with you to-night? I forget.'

'Oh, a heap of great people. Bores of the first water. Just the folks that always make me want to dance the Cancan in their faces, and make the seventh heaven of Mr. Challoner.'

'You have not asked, — the Comtesse d'Avesnes?'

'Etoile! My dear Io! Are you mad? What, ask a Paris Sappho to meet the Dean of St. Edmund's and the Countess of Norwich! When will you understand the decorum of the inviolate isle of fogs and fogies?'

And the Lady Joan went into her dressing-room with a laugh and shut the door, to glance over the London reviews on the Dean's learned study of the 'Use and Import of the Letter Koph.'

Ioris went out, and down the stairs thoughtfully. He was not at ease; he felt as if he had heard a blasphemy, and had let it pass, unrebuked, out of cowardice.

Lady Joan, her study of the Letter Koph completed, went to her toilette in a contented and radiant mood, and had her velvet dress put on, and ran a gilt spadella through her dark braids, and clasped a gilt waist-belt round her, and saw that she looked very well.

'He was actually jealous of those nice boys! What fun it is! Poor Io!' she thought to herself with that complacent pity for the sufferer from her own fascinations which is the greatest enjoyment of a very vain woman.

She was enraptured to think that the old folly was in him still, and she was in happy ignorance of the workings of his thoughts.

He was jealous! She smiled at herself in the glass with perfect satisfaction. After six years he was still jealous!

He was jealous—poor Io!

Lady Joan smiled at herself, thinking of Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates; and so in perfect good humour went into her drawing-room, to form a domestic picture on the hearthrug with her husband and child, by the time that Lord and Lady Norwich and the Dean of St. Edmund's and his wife entered, coming all together from the Hôtel des Iles Britanniques.

She was on such good terms with herself that she behaved with admirable composure throughout five hours of dreary and dignified platitudes, and enraptured the Dean with her sound views of the dangers of Christianity from the Greek Church, and thanked Lady Barbara with effusion for a promised recipe for knitting children's woollen stockings.

'We have only one treasure, you know,' said

Lady Joan, with her warmest smile, 'and I like to fancy she wears anything of my own making when I can!'

'Such a natural sentiment!' rejoined the Dean's wife, quite touched. She had left sons and daughters of all ages in the monastic shades of St. Edmund's, and worshipped them.

'What an excellent young woman that is, my dear!' said Lady Barbara to the Dean as they drove home to their hotel. 'And such a devoted mother too, evidently.'

'A vastly agreeable woman,' murmured the Dean, in tones as soft and thick as the *tête de crême* he had been drinking. 'Good common sense in her — no superficiality — her remarks about my pamphlet were really astonishingly clever. Quite a deep knowledge for a woman. A very bad marriage she made; a very bad marriage. I remember wondering at it at the time. But it seems to have turned out remarkably well — house nicely appointed — nice dinner — that sturgeon was particularly well done.'

'And Mr. Challoner such a good creature.'

'Sensible man; something in the East, wasn't

he? Consul—carpets—something that began with a C, I know. Asked me to go with him to see a Gentile da Fabriano that is to be had as a wonderful bargain.'

'Oh, yes, she told me about it. It belongs to that striking-looking man that sat quite silent at dinner, an Italian, a great friend of theirs; he'd been with the King of Denmark all day; and I fancy he's very poor by what she said—that it would be a charity.'

'Ah! the Italians always are as poor as church rats. Certainly, let us go and see it. I always admire Gentile and all that school of Early Upper Italy. They are very kind people evidently—excellent people.'

So the Dean of St. Edmund's droned himself into a doze, and was ready whenever he should go back to his cloister to vow in society everywhere that by all his clerical dignity Joan Challoner was the most estimable of her sex; and his wife was ready to second him.

Thus just by reading about the letter Koph for ten minutes, and by begging a recipe to knit woollen stockings, she secured champions

in the Church of England, and sold a picture next day at a net profit of three hundred pounds.

'Have I a soul?' said Voltaire's peacock. 'Certainly I have: look at my tail.'

Lady Joan would have said, 'Certainly I have: look at my card-basket and my bargains.'

'You were very stupid to-night, Io,' she said roughly when the Dean and his lady were fairly away and Ioris remained alone with her, with the lamps burning low. 'You were very stupid to-night,' she said, giving a twist to the silver-gilt spilla in her coiled hair.

'I have a headache, *carissima mia*.'

Lady Joan looked dubiously at him.

'You're always having headaches now.'

'And you do not pity me?'

'I wish you wouldn't always have 'em just when *my* friends dine here,' she said ungraciously. 'You're always well enough when that woman's here.'

'What woman?'

'As if you didn't know! You're twice as civil to her as you need be. Marjory's noticed

it, I can tell you. Oh, don't look so innocent. You're always after Etoile. You know you are.'

'*Mais, ma chère!* You always see me courteous, I hope, to all your sex.'

'All my fiddlesticks! Courteous indeed! You're much more than courteous—talking to her all night, going away when she goes away, sitting staring at her as if she were something new-fallen from heaven.'

'*Mais, ma chère!* What exaggeration! I told you the first night we saw her that she did not even please me; that she was insolent, and was cold—she is lost in her art—she does not perceive that such mere mortals as myself exist.'

'You try to show her you exist, at any rate. Marjory saw you walking with her this very day in the Colonna gardens.'

'*La bonne* Marjory must want to make mischief. I came up from calling on Marc' Antonio by the gardens to make a short cut, and she was there—it was the purest accident.'

'Humph!' Lady Joan was a woman of

experience, and did not believe in accidents between men and women.

'Do not let us quarrel about nothing,' he said, rousing himself and altering the twist of the gilded spilla. 'She is no woman to me. If I look at her at all it is merely as one would look at old Grillparzer at Vienna, or Wagner at Baireuth—for the sake of what she has done. When a woman has entered a public arena she is half-unsexed. You know what I think of notoriety for your sex.'

His heart smote him as he spoke, as though he uttered a blasphemy against the saints of his childish faith. But he did speak with an admirable carelessness and contempt combined which carried conviction to his hearer's ear.

Lady Joan liked to be persuaded that she had voluntarily abstained from being a celebrity, as Richelieu liked to be persuaded that he had voluntarily abstained from being a poet. Besides, she was always easily lulled into complacent serenity. A very vain woman is easily deceived, because it seems impossible to her that anyone can ever be preferred to herself.

He played with the spilla in her hair and leaned over her in the mellow lamplight. She looked up into his amorous eyes, and was content; the lustre in them was dim to what she had once seen there and the fire spent, yet he knew how to make their dreamy depths tell the tale she had heard ten thousand times and never tired of; it was only acting now, but it was acting so perfect that she lived its dupe in happy blindness. Keen, and shrewd, and hard of temper though she was, here she was duped as utterly as the softest and silliest of her sex.

Though very clever in many ways, one thing in her was stronger than her cleverness, and that was vanity.

A very trustful woman believes in her lover's fidelity with her heart; a very vain woman believes in it with her head.

To Lady Joan it would have seemed more possible for the stars to fall from the sky than for any man to desert her.

In passion for him she was as reasonless and as sightless as any Juliet or Gretchen lying for the first moment in her lover's arms. The years

had blown low the flame in him, but in her they had only fanned it to a fiercer strength. The ridicule of him, the command of him, the oppression and the tyranny and the suspicion of him, were only her way of showing power, only her device for making her world believe the thing she wished. Alone with him, love intoxicated, drugged, subdued her; alone with him, she was only an eager, passionate, voluptuous mistress; alone with him, she was only Cleopatra—the Dame du Comptoir was dead.

Ioris was in everything the superior of his tyrant.

In intelligence, in taste, in culture, in disposition he was alike far beyond her. Yet, by a coarse, rough energy which swept before it his hesitating temperament, and by a sensual, fierce passion which his soft nature recoiled from conflict with, she had obtained a dominion over him which he had ceased even to think of contesting. The women who love men truly never obtain this power: they love too well to watch the occasion to seize it. The old proverb that, between two, one is always booted and spurred,

the other always saddled and bridled, is as true as proverbs always are, which are 'the distilled drops of the experience of nations.' It is not superiority of mind, or of character, or of person that determines which shall ride and which shall be ridden; it is generally rather the result of a certain hardness of temper which determines the question early in the day and never loses the supremacy. Taken roughly it may be safely predicted that it will always be the higher nature which will submit. Often it is the jade that rules the hero, the fool that has feet kissed by the genius.

The very fierceness and force and fire of this woman, which had at first intoxicated him, served now at once to repel and to intimidate him.

From the stern eyes, from the imperious voice, from the vigorous gestures, from the resolute will that had once fascinated him by their sheer strength which swept his softer nature away on it as a mountain torrent sweeps a tree, he had little by little grown to recoil in the inevitable reaction of all purely animal passion. Her heel

was set on his throat. Once he had kissed the foot that so degraded him. But little by little he had begun to breathe labouredly under its oppression. Little by little the desire to raise it and rise had come to him. He was tired of his life.

Tired of the orders and counter-orders, of the buying and selling, of the petty hypocrisies, of the puerile aims, of the exactions that compelled him to follow like her shadow her path through society, of the obligation to show himself wheresoever she might choose to go in that continual attendance which is a rapture when voluntary from passion, a deathly fatigue when imposed from habit—he was like a prisoner who drags a cannon-ball at his ankle.

Night after night, as he dressed to go through the social comedy whose every speech and gesture he knew beforehand, he sighed, impatient to be free; and yet he went. Habit is an ever-lengthening chain whose links get heavier with each added ring.

With her their love was still alive, an ever-burning fire, irresistible and insatiable in its

hours of abandonment. With him their love was dead, and was replaced by habit.

It is a terrible difference.

Letting himself out of her house in the cold rosy dawn he shuddered, not with the physical chill of the wintry night, but at the vision of his own future.

'This woman always!'

So he thought every morning, yet every night he went back to her, as the mill-horse to its yoke. She was not faithful to him, because such women as she know not fidelity. She was not truthful to him, because truth was not in her and could not find its home in her mouth. She was the ruin of his life, whilst she declared herself his salvation. Her tyranny, her exactions, her ridicule, and her overwhelming egotism cast into the cold shade of men's scorn the man whom she delighted to oppress and wound, as a child loves to hurt the pet that it hugs to its bosom. His idiosyncrasies were lost under her inordinate vanities, and her obtrusive personalities drove him to the refuge of silence and self-repression. He passed his life like a tree under the shadow

of a high wall: only the wall had been built up brick and brick, so that he had never noticed it till it was for ever there between him and the sun.

She herself was in love still—with that terrible and untiring passion which can exist in a woman who to masculine vigour unites feminine caprice.

She delighted to make him subservient, to render him absurd, to deny him any will of his own, to ridicule his words, to mock at him before the world. But this was the result only of her natural temper. It was only as she beat a dog, or punished a child, or tyrannised over whatever lay at her mercy. Besides, she thought that it imposed on her society; she thought that it veiled her own passion for him, which was strong and fierce and keen; which begrudged a glance or a smile from him elsewhere; which took a voluptuous delight in his person, in his touch. But in his presence, in his regard, in his caress, there was still intoxication for her; she would have seen him dead sooner than given to another; her passion was violent, faithless, cruel, ignoble,

but it was passion, and it was living still; a restless sea of fire that beat itself upon the cold ashes of his own dead desires till it warmed them to a semblance of itself.

Once he had felt as tiger-tamers feel, and the very danger that there was in the creature he caressed had served to enthrall him. Little by little the reality of the tigress temper had become visible to him, and its greed and hardness and predatory instincts were revealed. This queen of the desert that laid her soft cheek against his was, after all, only a cat that growled. Little by little the sense stole on him that his arms held what preyed on him—and would devour him.

But when he awoke to his own peril it was too late — the tamed tigress had sprung and mastered him.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEOPATRA after sunset, the Lady Joan rose nevertheless every morning Dame du Comptoir to the tips of her fingers. Eventide might be for the mandoline or the mask, and the tender passions and the fierce ones, but noonday was none the less for business.

Her forenoons were sternly given to those commercial considerations for which she had brought a leaning from the banks of Abana and Pharphar, Orontes and Euphrates. Telegrams and letters about her various speculations and gigantic commercial transactions scarcely let her swallow her breakfast in comfort; and these attended to, there were the teacups and triptychs,

the pots and the pans of her excellent friends and brothers Mimo and Trillo; china to be packed, canvases to be backed, and all the minutiæ to be attended to of that sublime mission of the diffusion of Art which she had set herself as her object in life, only secondary to the Berkshire pigs and the Brahma poultry, and the general salvation of Fiordelisa.

Mimo and Trillo were the very Dioscuri of Art; twin Tyndarids of connoisseurship and commerce; Gemini of genius who were both unspeakably dear to her; though plump Mimo bore off the palm as far as being petted by her went, and was by far the most enthusiastic in her praises. According to him she was angelic, heroic, unequalled, far above all the mortal weaknesses of her sex, and only possessing one little, little, little fault—that of being so unnaturally and superhumanly perfect that she was incapable of conceiving that a base-minded world could ever put incorrect constructions on her noble actions.

'Poverina! Certainly she compromises herself; alas! she does compromise herself; but it

is only the boldness of innocence!' said Mimo, with a bit of cracked Limoges in his hand and a big cigar in his mouth.

'It was the boldness of innocence.' It cost the good fellow no more to say so than it did to say that any one of his round plates, painted and baked by a living workman in a cellar in the Trastevere, was pure Gubbio ware, with the iridescent hues coloured by Maestro Giorgio himself.

'It was the boldness of innocence.'

The phrase tickled the fancy of Mimo very much, and was for ever ready on his tongue, as '*Antico—proprio antico*!' was for ever on it before any doubtful plaque of *repoussé* work or any *quattrocentista* bridal coffer that had been carved and gilded the week before. 'It was the boldness of innocence.' After all, if the phrase pleased her so much, it cost him very little to say it; and what mortal man would not learn it by heart, when, just for saying it, you get a cosy sofa to lounge in, and a nice little dinner to eat, and a handsome woman to pet you?

Besides, 'the boldness of innocence' is like

the reputation for oddity—once accorded, it is as elastic as indiarubber and as comprehensive as the umbrellas of the kings of the East, which would shelter three hundred men. There is nothing you cannot explain away with it; before it Juvenal himself would be obliged to make his bow and retire quite satisfied.

Trillo was somewhat more austere, and had not the comfortable roundness as of a child's tumbler or an Indian god which characterised Mimo; he was also more astute, and could never be brought to rhapsodise as Mimo would do over the Berkshire pigs and the Minerva who had imported them. Trillo went in for high art; found marvellous Raffaelles and Luca della Robbias in old cellars and old walls; and though occasionally to oblige he would condescend to furniture, he would never run about and find old chairs for you, as Mimo would do any day of his life. Trillo had only a studio, and never had anything else, whereas Mimo, if you were buying a good deal of him, did not so much mind your calling his chambers a shop. But this unbending austerity of Trillo made him, perhaps, the more useful of

the two in the main. Trillo even impressed the great Hebrides family, and found them a stove painted by Hirschvögel when that master stayed and worked in Venice, and an altar-screen in ivory carved by Desidirio, before which all South Kensington subsequently went on its knees. He had been, indeed, so fortunate as to find these exact works of art three years before for Prince Kouramasine, who had borne them off to his castle in White Russia; but White Russia and Ben Nevis are far-sundered; and the designs were so beautiful that it was not extraordinary that both Hirschvögel and Desidirio should have been so enamoured of them as to have executed them twice.

Both Mimo and Trillo, who were men of judgment, suffered many things from the ignorance of their Minerva. She would confuse styles and orders, jumble up schools and epochs, call Turin Arazzi Gobelin, and Frankenthal china Worcester; attribute a Dutch ivory to Alessandro Algardi, and a post-Renaissance painting to Spinello or Francia; and they would shiver when these mistakes were made before folks that knew, and would groan together in secret.

But these were trifles after all; there were so very few folks that knew; and their Minerva was invaluable to them, and they sat at her feet solemn as the owl of her emblem, whenever the great Scotch cousins came with her, or the much-enduring British tourist was brought in her train. Indeed, in one sense her ignorance was advantageous: it looked so frank.

Indeed, her very blunders became useful.

Trillo would pull his beard and sigh that the dear and noble lady had such wonderful natural intelligence that she had never been brought to correct it by study. She had too much good faith too: she fell a prey to designing persons; and Trillo pulled his beard, and sighed again, and confessed that a good deal the dear and noble lady had in her house was *robaccia*—all sheer *robaccia*! She had been imposed on; she was always imposed on when he and Mimo were not by; she had a few real gems—yes, *a* few real gems—Mimo and he had secured them for her; but as for the rest——! Now, mutual admiration societies answer well; but mutual depreciation societies answer, perhaps, still better. The

former is a gilded screen that may soon fall to pieces; but the latter is an impenetrable haze, such as hid Jove from mortal eyes profane.

The tried partnership between the Temple of All the Virtues, and Mimo and Trillo had never been signed or sealed—nay, never even been whispered—but it served its purpose admirably.

When people took tea and a muffin in the Temple, they did not see the fine wires connecting it with the shop and the studio; and when they went to the shop and the studio they did not discern the metaphorical telephone by which shop and studio took counsel with the Temple. But nevertheless the impalpable lines were there; and Mimo and Trillo, who were the Owl and the Ægis of Minerva, naturally absorbed much of Minerva's attention, especially when there came any mighty cousins wanting teacups and triptychs, or an Æsthetic Dean or a Ritualistic Rector with a pretty taste in the way of carved choir-seats or ornamented vestments.

So that in one way or another she was always very busy.

That practical half of her temperament

which Voightel had called the *dame du comptoir* was filled with a multiplicity of objects and interests, from new people to conciliate to old china to sell, from bargains to be disposed of to balls to get invited to, from companies to be floated to visiting cards to be left; and this harassing and multitudinous minutiæ of interests so absorbed her at times that she actually forgot to watch Ioris, and left him a certain slender enjoyment of personal liberty of which he was quick to avail himself to the utmost.

Prudence at times required that she should call on people with no escort but Mr. Challoner's; business at times required that she should rummage amidst old lumber shops with Burletta as her guardian and guide; her own pleasure at times required that she should disport herself at theatres or in Campagna rides with Douglas Græme or young Guido Serravalle. Occasionally, too, there would pass through Rome some old friend of the camping-out days of the Desert, of whom it was not judicious to allow Ioris to see too much, since Ioris had queer fancies, and amongst them was one that she had been a stranger to

Eros and Anteros till he met her. Men will have these notions—pure vanity, no doubt—but it is never worth while to disturb them.

So thus — here and there — he gained his morning or evening of freedom; and whenever such a release came to him he hesitated never now as to how he should spend it, but wended his way to the old house by the Rospigliosi garden and made friends with Tsar, and sat in the dreamy fragrance of Etoile's narcissi and winter-roses.

Very clever as both the Lady Joan and Marjory Scrope were in their several manners, and experienced as the latter certainly was in masculine ways and wiles, to neither of them did it occur to remember, in their observations of Ioris, two things.

First, that human nature yearns for freedom.

Secondly, that human nature has a tendency towards that which is forbidden.

When they set themselves in their several modes to watch him, and were convinced that they succeeded in learning all his actions, they never took into account that men are like school-

children, and cannot by any amount of spying be hindered from wholly following their bent, and will only be driven into devices for concealing it.

The real temper of Ioris, the amorous but reticent, impassioned yet impassive temperament of his nationality had been long lost sight of under the dulling influence of a galling routine. The semi-conjugal character of his position in the Casa Challoner and at Fiordelisa had long taken all savour of intrigue out of it; it was impossible to cheat himself into thinking he was climbing an *escalier dérobé* when Mr. Challoner welcomed him so blandly up the grand staircase; his life had long lost the supreme charm of life: it had lost all possibility of the unforeseen arriving in it. Rising in the morning he knew all the routine of the coming twenty-four hours as well as he knew the numerals on the clock's face which would tell them as they passed.

In her intense eagerness to absorb him completely, she had overshot her mark; she had washed out of his life all expectation and

all desire. She had made it a mere sand-plain, monotonous and arid, with her own figure looming perpetually in mirage on its horizon, till turn where he would he could see nothing else.

When the charm of a new interest, the mystery of a character he did not comprehend, the attraction of a woman unlike any that he had ever known—when all these fell in his path he gave way to the impulse that moved him to pursue them, with hardly more thought at first than a child has as it runs down a by-path to see nearer a butterfly on the wing.

'*Vous l'avez voulu*!' he would have said to the woman who had sought to blind his eyes and bind his fancies. She had done it herself: the slave's life into which she had enchained him had made the slave's instincts awake in him: the instincts to hide and to escape.

He had fallen into an utterly cheerless routine of existence, to which he was only reconciled by the sort of ferocious seduction that she still possessed for him; but when the eyes of Etoile first met his they had awakened the dormant romance and the forgotten dreams of his youth.

It became sweet to him to have thoughts that his tyrant could not divine, sympathies that she could not reach, happy hours that she could not mar; and at first he merely concealed the frequency of his visits to Etoile as he concealed every better emotion that he felt from his mistress. As it was she never suspected them.

In the forenoons that she gave to Mimo and Trillo, and to business generally, she seldom ordered or expected his attendance, and most of those forenoons found him by Etoile's hearth, sitting in the fragrance of her heliotropes and hyacinths. When Lady Joan questioned him as to his morning he would say he had been at the Court or the Vatican, at the studios or the stables, and she was content.

To Ioris, who had much of the artist and something of the poet, and who might say, like Camors of his imagination, '*J'en ai, mais je l'étouffe*,' there was a pure and fresh pleasure in roaming over Rome with Etoile.

Accustomed for years to a woman who ransacked all art only to get something to buy cheap

and sell dear, and who regarded a picture or a bust only with an eye as to what it would fetch in ten years' time, he found a new delight in the culture and fancy of a woman to whom every stone had a story and every statue was a living friend. When he went with Etoile and stood before the Faun of the Capitol he saw that she grew very pale and was quite silent.

'What do you feel?' he asked her.

After a little while she answered him what she did feel and what with her was truth.

'I can hardly tell you. I have thought of all these marbles so long that really to see them seems stranger than a dream. The Faun is the very incarnation of the youth of the world. Three thousand years have passed since he was called to shape, and he smiles as if he had been called out from the white rock but yesterday. Yet so many creeds have changed, and so many empires fallen, and so many cities perished since he saw the light!—the Apollo again, he should not be the god of any art, for all art changes; he is the god of nature, the god eternal, the god of the flowers that grew out of Cæsar's ashes and the sea that

smiles though it drowned Shelley, and the sun that shines on while nations perish——'

Ioris, standing by her, thought of another woman who, coming there for the first time also, had made a wry face at the Apollo and snapped her fingers at him, and called this glory of the Belvedere a moonstruck posture-master, and this Faun of the Capitol a jolly little rogue, but had said she never could see what anybody found in stone dolls to rave about. He had dwelt with the lower and coarser intelligence till he had got used to it, but it had never altogether ceased to jar on him. The finer and more spiritual impulses in him revived and sprung up eagerly to meet the purer atmosphere of Etoile's fancies as pressed-down reeds spring up to meet the breeze.

Meditation and fancy were with her the very sap of life, pervading her from root to branch, as its sap a tree; with him they were but the upmost crown of leaf that fluttered in the wind, and was put forth, or frozen back, according to the air around. Yet there was likeness enough in them to give sympathy, and

whilst he was with her he thought and saw and spoke as she did—and was true in it.

He also met Etoile at one or two great houses, embassies, and palaces, where the Lady Joan did not penetrate, and where she permitted him to go, because she always hoped, some day or other, to squeeze herself in by his means.

When his tyrant was near, her boisterous self-assertion completely subdued him; her incessant watchfulness made him constrained; and, annoyed by her persistent claims on his attention, yet afraid to resist them, he had grown into the habit of a silent self-effacement in sheer self-defence.

Away from her he was transformed, and all the grace, talent, and social gifts natural to him had their play. Nature had bestowed on him a graceful and dignified presence, a face that attracted the eyes of all women, and that happy tact and charm of manner which in society outweigh all accomplishment and achievement.

He would have looked well in a panel of Giorgione's or a canvas of Vandyck's, and his grace and bearing went fittingly with these

grave old palaces of Rome, where the motley of modern society almost gathers the grace of a dead day by the spell of its surroundings, in the solemn beauty of galleries that Raffaelle painted, and the gorgeous vastness of halls that Michael Angelo built.

Etoile had looked at him at first as she would have done at a portrait or a statue; then the portrait smiled, the statue spoke; he lingered beside her in those noble galleries, where the genius of the past gazed down on the frivolity of the present; when she was occupied by others he stood near, mute and listening; when he was there he was her shadow; when he was not there she missed him.

Etoile, from the years when she had pored over Shakspeare, and Racine, and Goethe in the woodland shadows of her tranquil Ardennes, had had no passion save for her art; though it was not likely that the world in general was going to be so simple as to believe this. It is seldom that the world is simple enough to receive a truth. 'I am Truth, and have few acquaintances,' says the gentleman in Congreve's comedy:

when he comes in, most people look the other way.

Etoile in every fibre of her mind and temper was an artist. The artist quite absorbed and extinguished the woman in her. Men thought her—because they found her—cold. They paid her court and wooed her in all kinds of ways, but they all left her unmoved.

Sometimes she would watch two lovers gliding under moonlit trees, or look at a woman with a young child in her arms, and wish that this warmth of human love would touch her. But it did not.

She had many who wooed her, but none who moved her. Sometimes it seemed to her that she was like a high-strung instrument, that echoes all the emotions of the soul but remains itself insensible to them.

She led a life of much isolation by choice, and of much retirement by preference. She considered that to be great the artist must be much alone with himself and with nature, and the leisure she had was given to the arts. When she went into the world it amused her for half

an hour; then it grew tedious. She liked better her library, her atelier, her solitude; or the open air, where every breath that blew took her in fancy to the woods and waters of her happy childhood.

'You are an innocent woman, you are a famous woman, but you are not a happy woman,' said a great wise man to her once.

'No? I suppose there is always something missing,' she answered him.

Meanwhile the world in general knew that she was famous, thought that she was happy, but did not in the least believe her innocent.

To Ioris, as to the world, it seemed strange to find a woman who was still young, and had some place in the great world, passing her time in study and in thought. To come in with the early morning to her, and see her, with old chronicles and crabbed manuscripts, following the threads of disputed histories or gathering the thoughts of forgotten pasts, had a charm for him. In his youth he had been a student too, and to meet her in her own field he shook off him that worldly levity, and that lower habit of

thought which had obscured and absorbed his mind in his later years. It attracted yet it tantalised him to find her pure intellectual abstractions absorb her, whilst the daily pleasures of other women's lives scarce held her for a second. He felt that to make this woman know a human passion would be to draw her down to earth, and break her skyward-bearing wings, and yet he desired to do it—daily desired more and more.

As with him so with a chamois hunter who, seeing a mountain hawk sailing far, far away in the clear rarefied air above the clouds, lifts his rifle, and sends death through the blue serene sacred peace of the still heavens.

The bird drops into a deep abyss where no eyes see its dying agony. It is out of reach, and if reached were of no use to him who shot it, since he only seeks the chamois of the hills that gives him food and shoe-leather. And yet he fires.

And the bird is dead.

Something of the hunter's feeling woke in him now. She was so far away and so content

in that high air where nothing mortal followed. He wanted to bring her down and handle her closer, and feel if her heart beat— make it beat, indeed, by pain, if only pain would do it. Not from cruelty—oh, no. He was never cruel to the lowliest thing that moved. Only from vague curiosity, and a baffled wonder, and an awakening desire; and that eagerness for what is rare and strange, which is as eager in the man with his loves as in the child with his pastimes.

So he came to her constantly in the long mornings of the winter, when the sun grew warm at noon; and went to houses where he could meet her, when he could secure an hour's freedom; and studied her, and grew a little more familiar with her day by day, and learned the details of her life, and told her stories of his own, and gave her that delicate, half-uttered, all-eloquent sympathy which his tact, perhaps, rather than his heart taught him at first; and at times would sit quite silent gazing at her with that mystical, voluptuous, contemplative light in his dreamy gaze which Love has given to the southern and the eastern alone of the sons of men, and which

will draw a woman towards it as the sun draws up the dew.

Meanwhile the one who believed she held the key of his thoughts, knew nothing of the truth.

So long as he was always close at hand, to be shown off as a slave, so long as he consented to follow her about and be made absurd at her pleasure; so long as he bought and sold, and fetched and carried for her, and she could call on Io aloud to all the four winds of heaven whereso-ever she went, with the display and vanity that were so sweet to her, so long the Lady Joan was not a woman to notice a stifled sigh, a lag-gard step, a look of weariness, a gesture of reluc-tance. These are the signs that women who love well, read, trembling, and in themselves droop by, as the field-born pimpernel droops by the darker passing of a summer rain-cloud. But she was not one of these. Her vanity bore her buoyant against all perception of such changes. He was her servant, her worshipper, her lover, her plaything—what more could he want of heaven or of earth?

So long as she enchained his person it never occurred to her that his mind, and his heart, and his soul might be elsewhere.

Now and then a thrill of savage jealousy ran through her, wakened by some word of Marjory Scrope's or some sight of Etoile; but it was soon lulled by a careless laugh or a contemptuous denial from Ioris.

She was duped where a less vain and less arrogant temper would have been instantly alarmed.

Meanwhile oppression had its usual result, and produced as its fruit deception.

Ioris was of a frank and tender nature, but he had lived much amongst women, and they had made him false.

The untruthfulness of women communicates itself to the man whose chief society they form, and the perpetual necessities of intrigue end in corrupting the temper whose chief pursuit is passion.

Women who environ a man's fidelity by ceaseless suspicion, and exaction, create the evil that they dread.

Ioris deceived this woman at first in trifles, later on in graver things, because she ruthlessly demanded from him an amount of time and a surrender of will which no man will ever give without becoming either openly or secretly a rebel. She had made him fear her, so he betrayed her. In love, as in a kingdom, the tyrant sits upon a hollow throne.

But she was one of those to whom 'an immense Me was the measure of the Universe;' and this 'immense Me' obscured a sight otherwise sharp as the hawk's and clear as the pigeon's.

Meantime Ioris once more rose to the light of the day with the sense that the day might bring some charm he was not sure of, some interest he would not exhaust. Once more the delight of the uncertain had come to him, playing fitfully about his path; and once more the sound of the lutes in the moonlight, the sheen of the stars above the palms and laurels, seemed in unison with his fancies, because, once more, he felt young. He did not reason about it, because he was a man who never reasoned when he could

avoid doing so, and who always shut his eyelids as long as he could to what was inconvenient or painful. But he resigned himself with few struggles to the fresh influences that stole on him, and never asked himself when they would leave him.

His mistress had been right when she had said that there was something of the Faust and something of the Romeo in him, but there was still more of the Hamlet. He would bear the ills he had, for fear of others that he knew not of; and would question himself at times—

> Am I a coward?
> . . . . . It cannot be
> But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter.

The delicate, fanciful reasoning, the vacillation of thought which produced infirmity of purpose, the wounded pride which took refuge in silence, the complexity of impulses which baffled at unravelling them both friend and foe, the armour of jest, the inner core of sadness, had all of them the Hamlet cast. Like Hamlet he could smile upon his foe; like Hamlet he could make mock

of his own dishonour; like Hamlet, he was destined to say of the deepest passion of his life, 'You should not have believed me: I loved you not,'—and love the more all the while he said it.

CHAPTER XX.

'How ridiculous it is that *she* should go to such places!' said the Lady Joan a day or two later, with wrath and scorn, as she ate her breakfast, flinging away a local journal which recorded the name of Etoile in the list of guests at a Russian Grand Duchess's party.

'Why ridiculous?' said Ioris between his teeth, without looking up. His face grew darker as he stooped and picked up the paper.

'Why?' screamed the Lady Joan. '*Why?* It is worse than ridiculous! It is disgusting!'

'Why?' said Ioris very coldly.

The Lady Joan burst out laughing.

'Good heavens, Io! Where have you lived?

You who used to know Paris like a book; you who pretend to know the world!'

'I do not understand,' said her lover still coldly.

'Oh, don't you! I should think you might well enough, though you never can see half-an-inch before your nose! Look what a life she's led!'

'Perfectly innocent? That is rare. But is it forbidden, objectionable?'

The Lady Joan shrieked with fresh laughter.

'Innocent? You're innocent! Why, only listen to anybody talking about her for ten minutes, and you'll hear enough to set your very hair on end. You never went to 'em, I suppose; but her Sunday evenings in Paris were!—that I do know for a fact. Even respectable *men* wouldn't go.'

Ioris laughed a little slightingly.

'I have never met anyone of my sex so very virtuous. I suppose those very virtuous men belong to your country. But, *ma chère*, since you know such things of her, why receive her?'

'It was that old beast Voightel.'

'Surely it was your father?'

'Oh, Lord, no! She hardly knew papa. At least, yes, of course, she did know him, but he only went to her now and then.'

'Where the respectable men would not go? Poor Lord Archie!'

The Lady Joan coloured and grew angry.

'You know very well what I mean; poor dear papa never is as particular as he ought to be.' (Ioris thought of Lord Archie lying smoking under the cherry-trees of Fiordelisa, and mentally agreed that he was not.) 'And she charms men, and all that kind of thing; improper women always do,' continued the Lady Joan, who was so used to putting on her ruff of decorum that she would put it on sometimes even with those who had ruffled it the most. 'The life of Etoile has been infamous, altogether infamous. I know so many people who know all about her, and of course since we became acquainted with her, I've naturally inquired more. If I had known all I do now, of course I never would have let her set her foot in my door.'

'It is a very beautiful foot,' said Ioris, who

felt a great anger in him that he dared not display, and could not altogether smother; and, either by accident or design, his eyes glanced at the foot of the Lady Joan, visible from the shortness of her skirt, in the large stout boot which tramped over his ploughed fields and in and out so many studios, and up and down so many stairs of the Bona Dea's temples. The glance and the words filled up the measure of her fury—a fury she smothered as he did his anger, for these two people, whilst living in the closest intimacy, almost habitually deceived one another. She flung herself round to a bureau, and took out a letter and threw it to him.

'There, read that, since you don't believe *me!*'

Ioris read; his eyebrows drew together a little, but otherwise his face did not change. He read it calmly through, then gave it back to her.

'Conclusive—if true.'

It was a letter from a man who did ill in art what Etoile did supremely well; a man who had hungered after her successes with envious

greed for many a year; a man, moreover, who had endeavoured to pay court to her and had failed. To him, knowing him well, the Lady Joan had written a careless question or two about Etoile: in answer he had poured out — exaggerated—all that calumny had ever invented of her. Lady Joan had relied on the almost certain fact that when a man's or woman's nature is not noble, it will be very petty indeed; there is but little middle way betwixt the two.

'Conclusive, if true,' said Ioris carelessly, and handed her the sheet. 'But why should we quarrel about her? She is nothing to us: and she is here to-day and will be gone to-morrow.'

His heart was beating with anger and impatience, and a certain sickness of doubt was stealing upon him, and with it also a better impulse of chivalrous championship of the wronged and absent woman. But habit was stronger with him than any of these feelings, and it was his habit constantly to conceal all his real thoughts from his inquisitor. The screw never brings forth but a galled lie.

'If true!' echoed the Lady Joan a little more

satisfied, locking up her letter. 'There's no "if" about it. Anybody who knows her will tell you the same thing. It was disgraceful of my father to send her to *me*; but Voightel can always turn him round his finger, and Voightel's a beast.'

Ioris remained silent; he had heard Voightel rhapsodised over in the Casa Challoner with the most fervent worship as the most learned, most distinguished, most marvellous of men, and once, when he had been expected there, though he had not arrived, had seen the driest of wines, the choicest of pipes, the sweetest of words got ready to salute his arrival.

At the instant Mr. Challoner entered.

'We were talking of Etoile, Robert,' said his wife. 'Aren't you disgusted with that brute, Voightel, persuading my father to send her to *me*?'

Mr. Challoner was used to catching quickly a clue.

'It was certainly ill-advised,' he said in his best and most wooden manner. 'One cannot be too careful, and there are very odd stories——'

The Lady Joan felt that there were moments in which Mr. Challoner was priceless.

'So I was saying to Io,' she answered him. 'Her life in Paris was always very queer, wasn't it?'

'And you are always over-indulgent and hasty,' said Mr. Challoner, with the paternal manner which now and then he assumed with much effect. 'Yes; yes. Of course it would have been better not to have known her, but when we go to the country the acquaintance will die a natural death, and if she be here another winter we need not resume it. Here is a telegram from Sicily, Ioris.'

Telegrams from Sicily were always flying in at the Casa Challoner.

In gratitude to Free Italy for the agreeable refuge she gave them, and the many tea-cups and triptychs she let them pick up, Mr. Challoner and his wife (or rather his wife and Mr. Challoner) had determined on creating for her a tubular bridge.

The bridge was to go over the Straits of Messina, by the Gulf of Faro, and connect Sicily

with the mainland, and do away with brigandage and barbarism for ever and aye. There was very little of it made as yet, except upon paper; nothing, indeed, except some piles that had been driven in on the shore by Scylla; but the prospectus had been out, and the shares all sold for four years past, and a Scotch duke was the nominal head of it, and a great many clerks and contractors were fussing and fuming over it alike in Calabria and Cannon Street, and money was turning about it in the churn of the Exchanges and Chambers of Commerce.

'My bridge,' the Lady Joan called it, with a fine wholesale appropriation—as she said 'my farm' when talking of Fiordelisa.

She thought herself a great woman of business. The age of Money, of Concessions, of Capitalists, and of Limited Liabilities, has largely produced the female financier, who thinks, with M. de Camors, that '*l'humanité est composée des actionnaires.*' Other centuries have had their especial type of womanhood: the learned and graceful *hetaira*, the saintly and ascetic recluse, the warrior of Oriflamme or Red Rose, the *dame*

de beauté, all loveliness and light, like a dew-drop; the philosophic *précieuse*, with sesqui-pedalian phrase; the revolutionist, half nude of body and wholly nude of mind—each in her turn has given her sign and seal to her especial century, for better or for worse. The nineteenth century has some touch of all, but its own novelty of production is the female speculator.

The woman who, breathless, watches *la hausse* and *la baisse*; whose favour can only be won by some hint in advance of the newspapers; whose heart is locked to all save golden keys; who starts banks, who concocts companies, who keeps a broker as in the eighteenth century a woman kept a monkey, and in the twelfth a knight; whose especial art is to buy in at the right moments, and to sell out in the nick of time; who is great in railways and canals, and new bathing-places, and shares in fashionable streets; who chooses her lovers thinking of concessions, and kisses her friends for sake of the secrets they may betray from their husbands;—what other centuries may say of her who can tell?

The Hôtel Rambouillet thought itself higher

than heaven, and the generation of Catherine of Sienna believed her deal planks the sole highway to the throne of God.

But the present age is blessed with the female financier, and must make the best of her, as it must of the rotten railways, the bubble banks, the choked-up mines, the sand-filled canals, the solitudes of brick and mortar, which it owes to her genius.

Lady Joan believed herself to be one of these modern blessings. For those who would listen to her she had always miracles to tell of firms she saved and concessions she obtained, of ministers' graces won by her smile, and monarchs' signatures obtained by her intercession. According to herself, there was scarce a steamer that floated or banker that prospered, or traction-engine that ran, or new street that was traced out, from the Thames to the Nile, from the Danube to the Tigris, that did not owe something to her procreative or protecting powers. She described herself as a kind of ambulatory Lamp of Aladdin, and if you only rubbed her up (the right way) she would make a palace spring up for you like

a mushroom. How much of this was true, and how much imagination, was perhaps one of those things that no man will ever know—like the real thoughts of Lord Beaconsfield, or the real use of the secret-service money in England, or the real discoveries of the Black Cabinet under Persigny. It was an Eleusinian mystery.

Profane persons were apt to consider that her ability for commerce was chiefly exercised in buying pots and pans and chairs and tables, in old shops, in old highways and byways wherever she went, north, south, east, or west. But this was ill-nature. She really had a talent for getting up companies, and persuading people to take shares in them, and was very fond of running up the back-stairs of politics, and coming down them with the pot-luck of a ministerial concession or of a royal subsidy, picked up from the seething stewpan of international jobberies.

Her lovers devoutly believed in her as a woman of business. It was not an attribute that attracted, but it was one that awed them. 'Damn it, madam, who falls in love with attributes?' says Berkeley. Probably no one. But the chain

once fastened, certain attributes may serve to rivet it, especially when they are fear-compelling.

In his soul Ioris detested these South Sea Bubbles that his mistress was so fond of blowing. It is not engaging to see the Bourse quotations seized as eagerly as your love-notes could be, or to have a tender silence broken by a sudden recollection that Macmaw and Filljaw's telegram at once must be answered.

But, though it revolted him, it served to entangle him. His name was of use to her; she taught him how to obtain concessions, and knew herself how to work them when got; his influence was of use to her; his title sparkled on the Messina Bridge prospectus before the Board in Cannon Street, and enabled her to say in England that she had all Italy at her beck and call, as in Italy she said that she had all England. She was a woman of resources and of foresight; gradually she drew all his affairs into her hands, and made him drift at her will hither and thither; she got him into the habit of being guided by her, and habit has much weight on a southern temper; she thrust through her

amorous butterfly the honey-laden pin of commerce, and fastened down the wings that, without it, would have borne him to fresher flowers.

Besides, Finance served her well in other ways than this; if Paris and Menelaüs had gone together to build a bridge or dig a canal, they could never afterwards, for very ridicule's sake, have called up Greece to arms.

'They've gone to Calabria together to see about my bridge!' she would say to Mrs. Grundy at five o'clock tea. 'Such a bore, isn't it? I'm quite dull without them. But it will be a grand thing for Italy when it is done; so one must not mind trouble.'

'They' was her pet pronoun, her horse of battle, her choice piece of prudence, and Mrs. Grundy would go away and say to Mrs. Candour, 'He's only with her so much because they're making a tubular bridge by the Gulf of Faro. The Duke of Oban is president of it; a great deal of English money is put into it. Fine idea, very. Her idea originally, I believe. Oh! what a cruel backbiting world we live in, my dear!'

Meanwhile, until 'they' came back from

Calabria, Lady Joan petted good-looking Douglas Græme, or handsome Eccellino da Sestri, or Guido Serravalle with his guitar, or anybody else that came handy, and had cosy little dinners with plump Mimo in the corner, and tuneful Guido to sing to her, and enjoyed herself exceedingly, and wrote to Ioris word every day that she was wretched.

This winter morning, however, the telegram brought no call to Calabria, and she had planned to spend it at Fiordelisa. Mr. Challoner—the telegram disposed of—proceeded to tell her that it was ten o'clock, and the ponies were standing at the door.

The morning was still very cold; snow was still upon all the hills, a fierce wind was blowing boisterously down the face of the river; it was not attractive weather for the country. Ioris sighed uneasily as he took up all her shawls, and went downstairs, to be driven by her across the Campagna in the teeth of the Alpine blasts.

Mr. Challoner stood in the window upstairs, and watched their departure with the nearest approach to a smile that ever appeared upon his

countenance. Then he went into his own little sanctum, stirred up his fire, sat down in his most comfortable chair, and began to read his French and English papers. He felt that this morning at least he had the better part.

'He's a very useful fellow to me,' Mr. Challoner had said in an unguarded moment once, over some sherry, to old Lord George Stair, who had mumbled a vague assent, and had thought, amongst other wicked things he had read in his far-away youth, of Diderot's song of *Six Sous* that Grimm quotes in his Memoirs.

Meantime, while Mr. Challoner enjoyed his *Pall Mall Gazette* and his *Figaro* before an oak-fire, with a pipe of fragrant tobacco to make him yet more comfortable, the ponies sped on, under the lash of his wife's whip, through the chilly and windy morning.

'Are you grown dumb, Io?' she said sharply, as they flew over the frosted turf.

Ioris drew his furs closer across his mouth.

'It is not agreeable to swallow ice,' he said coldly, but the ice that hurt him was the ice at his heart, not the ice in the air.

'It is only jealousy made her say those things!' he was thinking to himself, and his fealty went out to Etoile, with the eager revolt and the caressing devotion that slander of an absent thing he cares for will rouse in any man who has a man's heart beating within him.

And he cared for her greatly already, though he was half unwilling and half afraid to face the truth of it and all its perils, and hid it from himself under the shelter of a thousand plausible synonyms and reasons.

The Lady Joan, who heeded cold weather no more than she heeded the cold shoulder of a desirable acquaintance, cut his ponies over the ears and rattled onward; with her pistol-case under her feet in case she should be in a mood to shoot cats or robins, on both of which she waged fiery war.

The cats might kill a chicken, and the robins steal a cherry.

Ioris often pleaded for both, but in vain.

The grand old house looked bleak and dreary in the cloudy angry day, with the mountain winds rushing through the leafless aisles of its

vineyards. Imperator howled in his kennel, and the heart of his master ached. The Lady Joan sprang down at the courtyard gate, and kilted her skirts high, and wrapped her waterproof about her, and calling out for Gian, for Vico, for Beppo, for Cecco, whilst those frightened servitors came tumbling out from stable, wine-cellar, toolhouse, and barn, strode away, to the delight of her soul, scolding, weighing, scrutinising, ordering, railing, altering, chaffering, bullying, raising heaven and earth because a measure was short, and unpacking a waggon-load of cabbages to make sure that their number was right. She had a hundred thousand things to do before she could enjoy herself, and shoot her cats and robins.

Ioris, free for the moment, lighted a cigar and strolled away by himself over his lonely fields, green with the tender young corn and red with bearberry and briony. He heard her voice in loud discussion with his bailiff as to which Roman bull was to be mated with the new brindled cow from Alderney, and shuddered a little in disgust as he heard. 'Her Breviary

is the stock-book!' he thought, and went on his lonely walk under the edge of the woods.

He thought of Etoile by her hearth.

Would she miss him this morning?

With Ioris gentle impulses were natural. His character had in it that honey of softness which the flies will eat—and tigers and bears as well as flies. Old people lived on him with no other claim than their utter uselessness; hangers-on devoured his substance because he had not resolution enough to cut them adrift; a poor old homeless soul slipt and broke her limb as he was passing, and he took her into his own house and kept her there year upon year; an unwillingness to see pain, and an aversion to wound, were strong in him; Lady Joan found it out and despised it, and laughed at it, and profited by it all at once. 'Io's such a fool,' she would say—and think him such a fool—and yet all the while love the folly in him from its own utter unlikeness to herself.

It had grown to be with him as of old it was with the Capet kings and their Maires du Palais. The natural indolence and infirmity of purpose which often cripples many fine and

delicate minds, found relief in her strong opinions and her decisive action. It became so much easier to answer, 'Ask the signora,' than to decide for himself between disputing servants or to refuse for himself a supplicant's petition. Things had to be done that he was not hard enough or rough enough to do himself; it became so much simpler to say 'Go to the signora' than incur an hour's contention, or send away an old farmer with tears in his eyes. She liked all this kind of authority and tyranny; and he detested it. So the habit of reliance on her grew; and being first sown by the generosity of his nature, became fast rooted in his nature's weakness.

There was not a question but that things went on in much more orderly mode since she had hung up her cachemire at Fiordelisa.

The old happy, careless, wasteful ways were ended, just as the old wooden ploughs that might have served Cincinnatus were replaced by new steel ones from Sheffield. True, the people were sullen and discontented; true, there was not a shepherd that did not scowl where he had been

used to smile, as he leaned on his staff on the thyme-covered hills and watched his padrone go by.

'But look at the figures at Torlonia's,' she would say if he remonstrated.

And how could he remind her that the figures at Torlonia's were not at the head of his own balance-sheet?

There are things that a man cannot say.

She had twisted the steward's whip and pen out of his hands with a jerk, had sent the drones and parasites flying, had brought the devil incarnate, the people thought, in screaming farm-engines; had cut down all the estimates and all the wages, had nipped off the beggar's crusts to crumble whole loaves away on her own hobbies, and had let her fancy run riot in building and cattle-breeding, if she could be said to have anything about her so aerial and foolish as a fancy.

All this was noisy, unpleasant, interminable work, though she thought it a paradise, and pooh-poohed any demurrer or remonstrance on the part of the master of Fiordelisa with the

sublime disdain she always showed for other people's feelings.

In the years that had elapsed since the family had gone there with the flower-seeds, and the kitchen boiler, and been first visited there by Lady George Scrope-Stair with her sanctifying knitting-needles, the quiet noble old place had known few moments of peace. Hammers had almost always been going; workmen working; smiths soldering; delvers digging; in a confusion of sounds that made Ioris's head ache, and made yawning gaps in his capital for endless wages. There is nothing in the world so amusing as to make improvements when other people will pay for them; vestries, landscape-gardeners, architects and city ædiles, all know this; and Lady Joan was not a whit behind vestries and ædiles in her appreciation of it.

Ioris looked wistful when a brave row of evergreen oaks fell, to give place to a row of bran new granaries, raised on new principles; or a rose-garden perished to make an acre of asparagus and pine-apple beds; he looked grave when he saw the sum-total that the new granaries and the

asparagus and pine-apple beds cost: did not the old barns and threshing-floors, the old vegetables and orchards, do just as well?

'You'll find the profit of it all by and by,' said the Lady Joan to him: as the vestries and ædiles say so to the public. But he failed ever to see the profit; he could only see Black Care as the bills came in, and the labourers crowded round his steward to be paid, week after week, month after month.

No doubt Lady Joan was a great administrator, but great administrators are expensive luxuries to the states which support them.

Ioris had never been rich, and with the new granaries and asparagus-beds, and all the other improvements, he felt himself growing poorer every hour.

He was very tired of it. He was stung by the muttered words and dark glances of his peasantry. He liked to be well with all people, and the discontent of his contadini oppressed him. In other years, when he had made brief visits in the vintage time, the people had worshipped him and met him with music and laughter and song, and

their tributes of fruits and of flowers; now they passed him sullenly, or if they stopped him, stopped but to complain. He was pained by them and for them—but he did nothing. Personal kindness he would show them whenever he could. But he did not lift his hand to stay hers that fell so heavily on them.

He loved them as he loved the hound Imperator. But he feared her more.

Often he would go out in the fields and roam by himself, for very weariness, and then on the beautiful wild hillside, scarlet with poppies, and fragrant with the wild cistus bushes, he would meet some old man or some young child, who would stop him and hold their hand out, and mutter of the tyrannies of the 'padrona' up at the house, and he would give them money that he could ill afford, and go back impatient and sorrowful, and, as he passed through the house, hear the notes of the mandoline twanging, and the tinkle of the coffee-cups upon the terrace, and the laughter of Lady Joan and of Burletta, and would avoid it all with a vague distaste, and go up to his own room and lock himself in there and

glance at his mother's portrait, and know that he had sinned and met his retribution.

In these old noble places life should be 'set to music;' Love, in its highest passion and its fairest forms; Art as the gift of God to man; day dreams, in which the hours unfold, beautiful and uncounted, like the leaves of the oleander flowers; nights, when 'the plighted hands are softly locked in sweet unsevered sleep;' gay laughter here and there, glad charity with all things; meditation now and then to deepen the wellsprings of the mind; the open air always; limbs bathed in the warmth as in a summer sea; opal skies of evening watched with fancies of the poets; and everywhere perpetual sense of a delicious rest, and of desire and of hope crowned to fruition; this was the life for Fiordelisa.

And he knew it.

And he instead abode in this: fierce wrangle, lowest aims; shrewd watchfulness for gain, perpetual chatter of art as means of loss and profit; hard tyranny and sated possession that dressed themselves as passion, and made dupes one of

each other; and all through the long and radiant hours of the day one voice for ever ringing in glee or wrath because a bird was shot, or theft of grain unpunished, or grapes by the high road poached, or old coins dug up under the garden-mould that could be sold again, or old pottery found in some poor peasant's hut, bought for a loaf of bread, and good in the winter for the guineas of a millionaire.

And he endured the one life and he dreamed of the other; and knew what the years might be, yet bore with them as they were from habit and from fear and from inertia, and meanwhile the Lady Joan reigned as she chose in Fiordelisa, and cut the trees, and weighed the produce, and vulgarised the rooms, and harried the peasantry, and meddled with the winepresses, and rooted herself into the soil, so that never should any step save hers be heard there, and never any offspring of his old race bloom there; and heeded not the desolation that she worked for him; heeded it no more than she did the curse of the peasant hungering in his hut, or the pangs of the song-bird dying in the summer.

What did his sighs or his people's matter to her?

So long as she kept Fiordelisa and drove Pippo and Grillo about, and trafficked in pictures and laces and furniture, and exhibited her lover in all places and possibilities to everybody as her prey and property and appendage, what did it matter to her whether the heart of the man was weary, or his nerves jaded, or his passion worn out—what did it matter to her that all liberty and peace and gladness had withered for him under her touch? What did it matter to her that he shut his eyes with a shudder from facing the blank that was all his hereafter?

Women who love to folly may watch with terror a weary glance, may torture their own hearts in endless doubt whether they be not unworthy of the heart that beats upon theirs, may be ready to cast themselves adrift on a sea of misery rather than drag as a weight for a day on the life that is dearer than their own soul to them. But the Lady Joan was no such fool.

She had got him and she held him fast, as a fisherman a prize from the sea. He might writhe,

might sigh, might struggle, might sicken, might be weary at times unto death—what did she care for that? She saw a glimpse of it sometimes, and it smote her vanity to the quick, though she never comprehended its full import; but it never entered her thoughts to release him or offer him release. She only pulled the curb tighter, and revenged herself by sharper observation and by harder tyranny.

So long as she had what she wanted, and incurred no mortification in the sight of others, she was not likely to set him free for any consideration so slight and unimportant to her as his own wishes. Weak women thought about those things, but Lady Joan was strong.

This day seemed to him more long and tedious than any he had ever passed.

When they sat down to luncheon in the chilly tapestried room which wanted summer and the roses of summer to brighten it, she entertained him with a bead-roll of her victories and her captives, of a stable-boy's theft punished, a kite killed and nailed to the door, a hundred thrushes trapped for market, a fox's earth found

and stopped that the fox might die of suffocation in its hole, a false bottom to a sieve detected as the grain was measured, an error found in the manure receipts, a stray dog shot, a cat hanged by the neck, a litter of pigs born. He listened wearily; he was tired of it all, because he was tired of her.

As yet he scarcely realised that this—the *quart d'heure de Rabelais*, to which all passion that is merely passion comes soon or late—had struck for him. He was silent and inattentive throughout the midday meal; and, when at length the Lady Joan, furious at his indifference, uprose from his table and threw some silver off it, and told him that he deserved to be ruined, and die in the hospital, and that she was a fool to fag out her life for him as she did, he could only sit silent still, being unable to reply according to his honest thoughts, and only hoped that she would not go into hysterics. Lady Joan could have hysterics when all other weapons failed, as well as the merest Rosa-Matilda that ever breathed.

This time, however, she did not go into them,

because she had a great many last instructions to give to the *buttero* about that Alderney cow, and also remembered that she was to dine at seven o'clock with her cousins Lord and Lady Fingal at the Iles Britanniques. For checking hysterics there is no receipt so good as to remember a dinner-party.

It was twilight in the freezing winter's day when she deigned at length to depart, with some pine-apples out of the hotbeds for her friends, and give her last order, and leave the grand old house to the night and the cold, and drive back across the plain with two mounted shepherds behind them, well-armed, in case of any thieves that might spring from behind a ruined tomb or cluster of acacias.

They reached home in safety, where Mr. Challoner, having passed a tranquil afternoon in the club and at the Messina Bridge offices, where he was held an oracle, was waiting, ready dressed for the Fingal dinner, with lighted lamps and an evening newspaper, serene and solemn in his solitude as a Red Indian chief at a 'big smoke.'

Ioris, who was not invited to the Fingal party, excused himself from remaining to see them off on the plea of a chill he had felt and much correspondence to answer, and hurried to the house of Etoile ere it should be the hour for his attendance at the Quirinal.

'I cannot sleep without seeing her,' he said to himself.

'What on earth's come to Io, I wonder,' said the Lady Joan very crossly. 'He's always ill now—or stupid.'

Mr. Challoner lifted his eyes from his *Pall Mall Gazette.*

'In love,' he said, curtly, with immovable visage, and replaced his eyeglass, which had dropped. He and his wife always kept up a polite fiction between themselves, even in private; Ioris was their common friend.

Lady Joan darted from her brilliant eyes such a look of flame as a tigress might give whose hard-earned prey was snatched from her jaws.

'Pshaw!' she said savagely, 'what an idiot you are, Robert, always!'

Mr. Challoner perused the *Pall Mall Gazette*

unmoved: revenge was sweet, but peace was sweeter.

Fortunately, to preserve his peace in the absence of the supreme guardian of it, there entered handsome Douglas Græme, her cousin, who came to escort his cousin to their other cousins, the Fingals; and Lady Joan rushed to get herself into Genoa velvet, Irish point, and English propriety.

Meanwhile Ioris went and found Etoile in her chamber alone by the warmth of the hearth, and the spacious, quiet room, with its smell of hot-house heliotropes, and the odorous many-flowered narcissus—which in Italy we call *tazzette*, and in France *Jeannettes*, and in England have no popular name for, because we have not the plant—looked very familiar and inviting to him as he entered it, himself jaded, cold, and weary.

'I can stay but a few moments, I fear, but I thought I might venture to ask if you were well,' he said, softly bending to her with that look in his eyes by which a man tells the woman he looks on that she is a dearer sight to him than any other the world holds.

'You are not well yourself, you seem tired?' Her voice trembled a little as she spoke to him, and her eyes fell before his.

'I am tired,' he said, with a sigh.

The long, tasteless, dreary day unrolled before his memory as he spoke, begun in the chilly morning with altercation and strife, worn away in common cares and calculations of price and profit, ended with rough dispute or with coarse mirth as the sun began to grow low behind his leafless vineyards. They were all alike, these weary days, when it pleased his despot to call him forth in the cold mist that rose from the river, and make him go out to the old grey castle on the hill to levy tribute from his farms, and number his winter fruits, and harry the hearts of his people, in the pastime that she called looking after Fiordelisa.

Once, when this passion had been young in him, he had risen joyfully enough to skim the grey Campagna with her ere the day was fully up, and pass the hours in enamoured willingness in the solitudes of his deserted halls. But now!—he rose to these days with a yawn, he felt their dull

length drag on and on with a sigh; they left him at their close worn out and disdainful of himself.

'I am tired,' he said, now, standing by the fire, and letting his eyes rest themselves in dreamy contemplation on Etoile.

She gave him a yellow rose from a cluster that she had been placing in water as he had entered; there was tea standing near her on a little Japanese stand; she poured him out a cup, and brought it to him by the hearth; he followed all her movements with a sense of content and peace.

As she tendered him the little cup, his fingers caressed hers, and as he drew the cup away, his lips lingered on her wrist.

She coloured and left him.

'Where have you come from now?' she asked him as she went to the roses.

The words stung him as a snake stings.

'I have come from Fiordelisa.'

'Alone?'

'No! Have I ever the luxury to be alone?'

Her heart beat quicker with an anger that she did not seek to analyse.

'Why complain of what is your choice?'

'Was it ever *my* choice?' he muttered, thinking of those earliest hours when a black-browed stranger had set her will to bring him to her feet.

'Surely it must have been when you gave Fiordelisa.'

'I never gave Fiordelisa. I thought at most of one summer—of two——'

'Then how is it?——'

'How? Can I bid her go? I?'

Etoile rose and walked to and fro a moment impatiently, pushing her hair out of her eyes.

'It is useless for me to pretend to misunderstand. Your position is not one a woman can talk of—without shame. But it were absurd to deny that I see it in its true light, and that I am very sorry for you; very, very sorry! And yet how can you live on in it? The triangle of Dumas!—how unreal, how deceitful, how contemptible, how absolutely immoral in the deepest sense of immorality's degradation, is this sin that you and she, and the world with you, call Friendship. Sin!—the naked sins of

the old days were innocence and decency beside it. One can excuse sin that is honest, one can comprehend the fatal force of a blind passion, one can see how even an unholy love may be redeemed by sacrifice and courage. But this!—it is only one long lie palmed off upon the world, and as cowardly as every lie must ever be!'

'The world is not deluded by the lie, believe me,' said Ioris with his delicate contempt.

'If you had loved this woman,' she pursued disregarding, 'if you had loved her really with any kind of great love, however guilty before the laws of man, could you have ever borne to live like this, to take the husband's hand, to caress the child, to act the social farce—if you had really loved her with any truth of love, such share of her with her duties and her friends would have been impossible to you, such adoption of her hearth and home would have been loathsome!'

'There is love and love,' said Ioris. 'You think of a kind of love that is seldom felt, that women like her cannot kindle. You do not understand——'

'No! I do not understand. I understand passion, though I have not felt it—if you had struck the husband down upon the hearth, and borne the wife away from all the world—that I could have understood.'

Ioris laughed a dreary scornful laugh.

'I know not which soonest would have repented such a tragedy—she or he or I. There are women for whom the world may well be lost. Seriously, can you think her one of them?'

'You must have thought her one of them once, at the least, or else——'

'Good heavens! how little you realise, how little you comprehend——'

His thoughts drifted back to the early time when a new comer with basilisk eyes had cast her toils about him. The love born and matured behind black masks, in the fumes of cigarette smoke, in the riot of cotillons, in the daybreak hours after a ball, was not the love of which his companion spoke. The world well lost for love! —he laughed out of the very weariness and heart-sickness of his soul, thinking of his mistress in loup and domino—in ruff and starch—screaming

in the dingy crowd of the opera ball—lunching off lamb and lettuce with a dean!

'Perhaps I do not comprehend. I am glad then I do not!' said Etoile, with more impatience than she knew. 'If you slew the husband—or he you—I am barbarian enough to feel that that might come within my sympathies. It would at least be frank!'

Ioris laughed lightly and bitterly.

'Poor man! he is terribly tiresome and *très bourgeois*. But why should I kill him for that? As to his killing me, I am his best friend, his *souffre-douleur*, his whipping-boy. Whatever other qualities he may lack, he is not ungrateful, —to me!'

Etoile unconsciously pulled asunder a rose she held, and shred its petals on the floor.

'I said I was sorry for you. I retract it. Since you can jest so about your fate, you are worthy of it.'

'Jest!—I?'

He stooped and took her hands, and kissed them with a half-timid and half-passionate tenderness.

'If I jest, it is to hide that I suffer. Be sorry for me, Heaven knows I need it!'

And he kissed her hands again, and went to the Court, where he was in waiting that night.

Etoile stood by her hearth with the fallen rose leaves at her feet.

She felt as if some share of their falsehood and of their shame had fallen on her.

And yet a sweet and subtle joy which she felt afraid of stole upon her too.

CHAPTER XXI.

MEANTIME the Lady Joan went and dined with her cousins the Fingals, and returned thence, much out of temper, to her own house. The dinner at the Fingals had tried her patience sorely; it had been severe, dreary, dull; she had sat between an archæologist and a travelling Oxford Professor; neither had felt her fascinations, one had corrected her on a point of art; it was an utterly 'blank day,' both for business and amusement. She felt as ill-used as any M. F. H. who has been out from noon to night in rain and fog, and has never once 'found.' Lady Joan hated waste of time, or waste of anything, even of lamp-cottons; and she scolded her servants

for having so many lamps burning when she went home.

By the light of one of them she read some telegrams and letters; they did not improve her temper. They told her that the shares of the Bridge over the Messina Straits, to which the Italian ministers had refused the subsidy, were a drug on the market, and that a fine Parmeggianino she had sent to London for sale had been examined by rude experts, and declared good for nothing but the big piece of cypress-wood on which it was painted.

'Fools! dolts! idiots!' said Lady Joan, sweeping all the European exchanges and all European connoisseurs into the mighty circle of her scorn. *She* had promoted the Bridge, *she* had purchased the Parmeggianino; was that not enough for the world?

'They'll say my pigs are not Berkshires next!' she said in her wrath.

'No, no, no,' murmured Burletta, who had come in for a midnight cigar. 'No, no, no!—the pigs are transcendant pigs; of the plumpness and the roundness and the pinkness of babies are

those pigs, and their bacon will be as a foretaste of paradise; but as for pictures, and especially the Parmeggianino, you will do me the justice to admit, cara mia——'

'That you're a transcendant ass!' said the Lady Joan, furiously.

The very dear old Mimo lifted his shoulders to his ears and his eyebrows to the ceiling, and solemnly lighted an enormous cheroot.

'I always said the Parmeggianino would not go down in the City of London; I always said that it would not go down,' he reiterated, for he adored his goddess, but he adored still more proving himself in the right, and he had always averred that the Parmeggianino was too crude, was too brown, was too big, was too glazed, was too strong meat, in point of fact, even for Shoddy's acres of plaster walls.

'You thankless brute!' cried his Minerva, flinging all her letters away in a crumpled ball. 'Is that all your gratitude for my getting your Tabernacle sold to the Fingals?'

The very dear old Mimo reposed his fat person comfortably amongst the sofa cushions.

'My Tabernacle is a beautiful Tabernacle,' he said, tranquilly. 'Pure *Quattro Cento*; pure *Quattro Cento*; that I will swear—not a detail of it that is not *Quattro Centisto*; I chose every detail myself; and the wood is old—old—old—that too I will swear, and I ought to know, for the wood was a flour-hutch of my mother's when I was a baby, per Bacco! What more would Milordo Fingal have?'

'You are an ass, Mimo!' said Lady Joan, again, but she laughed a little whilst she frowned.

'Che-che—no! That I am not,' said Burletta, stoutly. 'In my way I am very wise. I know what the City of London and its very clever people will accept and what it will not accept, though I have never been there. It will be on its knees before my Tabernacle, if Milordo Fingal will show it in their Fine Arts Court; all their South Kensington will adore my mother's flour-hutch. But I did always say, you will allow, that the Parmeggianino——'

Lady Joan gave him a sounding box on the ear. Undisturbed, Burletta picked up his cigar, which had been shaken out of his mouth by

the shock, and kissed the Lady Joan's cruel fingers.

'Keep to the pigs, mia carissima, and let me choose the pictures,' he said, with paternal tenderness. And together they smoked the calumet of peace.

In the recesses of his own soul Burletta began to have his doubts about Palmerstonè; began to think that Palmerstonè might after all not be very much more genuine than the over-big Parmeggianino. He began to think that Minerva, like Jove, sometimes nodded, and that the Messina Bridge, and other wonderful benefits to mankind, were not very much more trustworthy than his own rickety Renaissance chairs, and not one half as solid as that venerable flour-hutch, which his zeal for the antique had transformed into a tabernacle. But his misgivings he shut into his own loyal soul; and trotted about none the less valiantly, holding up his plump hands, and crying:

'What a woman—ah, what a woman! Such influence, such power, such wisdom! And yet, look how she stoops to trifles—those hams, those

wines, those capons——' And then would be unable to proceed further from sheer ecstasy.

For to the very dear old Mimo who had slender fare at home, and indeed had been used to satisfy nature off a roll and a sausage at a small *osteria*, the breakfasts and dinners of the Casa Challoner and Fiordelisa were as banquets of the gods; and it would have been hard indeed if, in return for them, he would not have held up his hands and cried aloud:

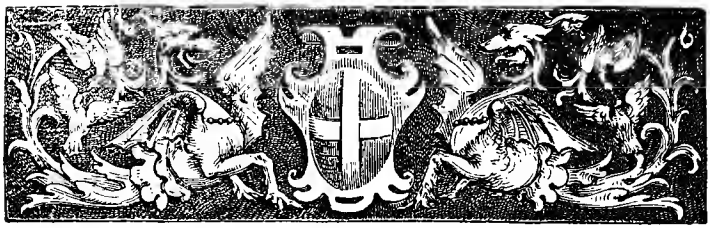
'Such a woman—ah, such a woman! The world has not her equal. There is nothing that she does not know, and nothing that she cannot do—nothing, nothing, nothing!'

And a good many people believed him, as they believed in his cracked bits of Limoges and his flour-hutch that was promoted to a tabernacle. There is nothing that you may not get people to believe in if you will only tell it them loud enough and often enough, till the welkin rings with it. A *claque* is an institution not confined to theatres, and naturally for a well-born lady who would take Lord and Lady Fingal to see his yellow ivories and his old Cremona fiddles, and

could get him sublime orders from the mighty Hebrides for all sorts of things, from church doors as big as Alps to enamels no bigger than your thumb, the good and grateful Mimo felt that he could never clap his hands loud enough before the stage of the world.

If she made mistakes—*ouf!*—she was a woman, or, at least, Mimo would say, with a sudden misgiving that this admission was derogatory to her—she was a goddess. But he, who metaphorically was the owl at the feet of this Minerva, could be familiar with her, as the owl may have jovially flapped its wings in merry moments over the disbarred Casque and the unbuckled Ægis, and in such confidential familiarity would venture to say to her:

'Keep to the pigs, *mia carissima*, and let me choose the pictures.'



CHAPTER XXII.

Lady Joan, who, when she was not blinded by the mufflers of her vanity and inordinate belief in herself, was very sharpsighted, saw that Society, when it has strained itself to swallow a good deal that is as much against its laws as wine against the Koran's, will, by the natural law of expansion and recoil, require to be equally severe in refusing to swallow something else if only in justification of its principles. Because Society always adheres to its principles; just as a Moslem subscribes none the less to the Koran because he may just have been blowing the froth off his bumper of Mumm's before he goes to his mosque.

The Duchess of Bridgewater was the highest and mightiest of gentlewomen, and her mere nod was honour, and if Lord Dauntless paid her bills, nobody could know it but his bankers, and all the great world stayed with her at her Castle of Indolence, in the heart of a county that crawled on its knees to her beck and her call. The Princess Gregarine was the mirror of fashion, and the privileged vixen of courts; if common soldiers in their guard-rooms toasted her as a common wanton as they drank their rum, a polite society knows nothing of what common soldiers say in their horrid guard-rooms. Lady Eyebright cheated at cards, and had her ears boxed, but she was always Lady Eyebright, because she never ran off with any one of her lovers, and had a host of great relatives making everything smooth as fast as she ruffled it. Mrs. Henry V. Clams kept open house all the year long, a pleasant hotel, where no bill was brought; with fresh pleasure for every shining hour, and no demands made on either brains or decency; a little temple of Fortune with Pactolus flowing through it, so that any who pleased could dip

his glass and drink and come again. And Lady Joan—Lady Joan was a precious precedent set on high like a lamp to lighten the darkness of all those ill-matched wives who fain would be consoled, yet fain would be both pitied and respected, as martyrs to a crooked circumstance. Society would not quarrel with any of these, nor any of the thousands of whom they were the types.

Quarrel, indeed! Nothing was further from its dreams. There was that 'Salve!' on the thresholds of these ladies' houses, and their like, that Society entering therein, and finding Vice seated by the hearth, would, on coming out, declare Vice quite a changed creature; nay, not Vice at all, but fair Friendship, gentle Generosity, mere Mirth, sweet *gaieté du cœur*, or what you will, something so innocent that saints might call her sister.

But nature has an inevitable law of expansion and recoil: a society so elastic is of necessity equally tightly drawn at times.

It will adore the Duchess of Bridgewater and Princess Gregarine; it will apologise for

Mrs. Henry V. Clams and Fiordelisa, and say with virtuous mien that it hates uncharitable judgment.

But, still after doing so much, it must for principle's sake condemn somebody, as the Turk, after his dry champagne, will order the stick to a Christian.

It always must have some criminal to garotte with the iron collar of its conscientious censure.

It had taken Dorotea Coronis.

Lady Joan saw no reason why it should not take Etoile too.

'Nothing against her?' she muttered, thinking over what she had heard. 'How sick one gets of their saying so! Nothing against her? There must be *heaps*, if one could only find it out! And if there isn't——'

The Lady Joan knew herself a woman of rare invention and resources; she could prove her cheap bargains to be priceless treasures, and fill princes' cabinets with her cupboard sweepings, she could make Staffordshire Saxe, and Raffaelles to order, call Titians from the nether world, and summon all antiquity: it would be odd indeed,

she thought, if she could not do such a little thing as smirch a character and blast a life.

'You make buttons out of Dante's skull!' cries Giusti in reproach to the world; Lady Joan saw no reason why she should not sharpen poison-arrows from her enemy's brain; for into an enemy her irritable, suspicious and self-conscious temper had already in her own thoughts raised Etoile.

'I don't know anything about her,' she would say with fine frankness to her society. 'My father knows her a little—yes—but then he's so good to all the world, and he always tries to believe the best of everybody. Of course, she has wonderful talent, but she must have had a very strange life—all alone, and amongst men so much, and hating women; where could she learn all she has done too, and get all that passion of the verses, and the other things? One wonders—that couldn't *all* be got out of a breviary. Oh, I daresay what she says is true; it may be, no doubt it is. Still, there must be a good deal more she doesn't say—there must be. Oh, it matters so little to me, you know. If I can be

of use to her, I don't mind what people like to chatter about me. My friends know me and won't misjudge me. As for the world, you know *I* never care a fig for it!'

This fiction, delivered as she could deliver her fictions, with a steadfast glance and an honest bluntness of tone, that carried conviction to her most sceptical listeners, was a seed which, falling on congenial soil, was certain to take root and bear its fitting fruit and flower.

She never said anything direct; oh, never anything direct in the least. On the contrary, she told everyone that she was herself most tolerant, and was not bound to be the judge of anybody, and had for her part seen so much of people of genius in her mother's house when she was quite a girl, that she saw no harm at all in any of their eccentricities. Still here and there she would confide to her associates her distress that other people had not her tolerance and were offended at meeting Etoile.

Society, which was always vaguely averse to Etoile, because she did not conciliate it, was very willing to receive such hints. There were high

spheres of it, indeed, where the fumes of such fictions could not reach, but through all the lower strata of it these fumes spread insidiously, like sulphur-smoke.

Mrs. Phidias Pratt shook her head, not willing to do more till she was quite sure not to offend Princess Vera by doing it; Mrs. Macscrip and Mrs. Henry V. Clams, and the colonies they represented, said that all the dear Embassy people were now-a-days so far too good-natured; and the Scrope-Stair sisters began to sigh, and hum and ha, and look sorrowful and mysterious, and murmur, 'Oh, don't be afraid—*don't*! She never comes to us on our day, she doesn't, indeed; and, of course, if ever she did, we would take care there should be no risk of your speaking.'

And Mr. Silverly Bell, with his softest voice and most purring manner, carried his gentle countenance into many a decorous drawing-room, and dropped a hint—just a hint—dear Lady Joan was too good-natured, dear Lord Archie was a trifle imprudent; out of kindness, oh yes, purest kindness, but a mistake; no,—he didn't wish to say anything, he never said anything; he

was not a gossip, like dear Lady Cardiff; nothing he abhorred more than gossip; still, when he loved and valued anyone as he did—whoever it was he was calling on—he thought it right to warn them from making any acquaintance they might hereafter regret.

In a word, he earned his luncheons and dinners and petting in the Casa Challoner. All the Lady Joan's pets had to work hard for her.

This however did not, of course, prevent Mr. Silverly Bell from calling, himself, eagerly on Etoile, and drinking her tea with a slice of lemon in it, and feeling very comfortable by her fire, and pretending to adore her and Tsar.

'A *man* may go anywhere!' he would say with a pretty deprecating little smile, when Mrs. Macscrip or Mrs. Middleway would tax him with going very often to the Montecavallo to see 'that' woman.

'A man may go anywhere, and an *old* man, too!' he would say charmingly, and look a little guilty, as if he saw and heard things in the rooms by the Rospigliosi gardens that were sadly

tempting to the old Adam, old though it was in him.

The spy of Society is an institution quite as useful to private ends as to political ones. As his reward, Lady Joan asked him to a dinner given for the Hebrides, and told Lady Hebrides he was her dear old Saint Paul.

'Dear, dear!' thought Lady Cardiff, when she saw these sulphur fumes rising, 'why didn't she take a caprice for a married man, have a fancy for a drunken sculptor, go to nasty museums in men's clothes, or anything of that kind. They would have said nothing about her *then*. When a person is famous the world will have stories of some sort. It's better to give it something tangible, it talks much less; Heavens! if she'd only had a caprice for an attic and an artist, or spent six months with the married man, as I say, we should all be swearing her innocence till we were hoarse—just as the dear Scrope-Stairs swear to Lady Joan's. You ought never to disappoint the world. It is a *pieuvre*, and has a million mouths; you can't shut them all; you can only give them something to suck.'

Etoile, meanwhile, was serenely unconscious of all these threads netting, and mouths opening, about her feet, and had she been conscious, would have been as serenely indifferent.

She passed her days in great dreams and great studies; the world was beautiful about her, and its past full of all the terrible and tender mysteries of the human soul; every hour had for her some art to be pursued, some aim to be kept sight of; she believed in a god—

Qui puisse donner un astre à un âme innocent.

All the little conspiracies and petty cruelties of a world of women were noticed no more by her than were the gnats in the air, or the dust on the stones, any day that she mounted the Scala Regia to gaze at the Sistina Sibyls.

Lady Cardiff, who did not care much for the Sistina Sibyls, and who had said correctly that a grain of dust may blind you, ventured on a word of warning.

'You do not conciliate women,' she said one day. 'You do not think about them; oh no; of course not; but believe me, a woman who does

not is socially lost. Her sex will wait—wait years maybe—but will fall on her like Destiny at last, and rend her in pieces, some way or another. To please our own sex we must either confer benefits or crave them; we must be either patron or toady.'

'What a noble choice of parts you offer us!'

Lady Cardiff was invulnerable to rebuke.

'Of course, to patronise is more agreeable,' she pursued imperturbably. 'But I am not sure but what the toady in the long run gets most cakes and ale. Believe me, women hold the keys of the world for a woman; but to get the keys you must crawl to their goodwill upon your knees, as the true believers up the Scala Sancta. To a fearless temper that respects itself this is impossible you say? Yes, my dear, and that is just why frank and fearless spirits have generally such a very bad time of it in this world. There is only one way to deal with women: be very civil to their faces, and do them all the harm you can, especially behind their backs in a drawing room; never offend one and never trust one; kiss them as if they were your salvation, and watch them

as if they were your assassins. "Live with your friends, remembering they will one day be your enemies." Talleyrand's advice is sound for our sex at all events. If you want a thing made public, tell it to three women separately in private; cry; say it will be ruin to you if it ever get known; and by seven o'clock next day all the town will have heard of it. You may be quite satisfied of that. Women never like one another, except now and then an old woman and a young woman like you and me. They are good to one another amongst the poor, you say? Oh, that I don't know anything about. They may be. Barbarians always retain the savage virtues. In society women hate one another. All the more because in society they have to smile in each other's faces every night of their lives. Only think what that is, my dear!—to grudge each other's conquests, to grudge each other's diamonds, to study each other's dress, to watch each other's wrinkles, to outshine each other always on every possible occasion, big or little, and yet always to be obliged to give pet names to each other, and visit each other with elaborate cere-

monial — why women *must* hate each other! Society makes them. Your poor folks, I daresay, in the midst of their toiling and moiling, and scrubbing and scraping, and starving and begging, do do each other kindly turns, and put bread in each other's mouths now and then, because they can scratch each other's eyes out, and call each other hussies in the streets, any minute they like, in the most open manner. But in society women's entire life is a struggle for precedence, precedence in everything—beauty, money, rank, success, dress, everything. We have to smother hate under smiles, and envy under compliment, and while we are dying to say "you hussy," like the women in the street, we are obliged, instead of boxing her ears, to kiss her on both cheeks, and cry, "Oh, my dearest—how charming of you—so kind!" Only think what all that repression means. You laugh? Oh, you very clever people always do laugh at these things. But you must study Society, or suffer from it, sooner or later. If you don't always strive to go out before everybody, life will end in everybody going out before you; every-

body—down to the shoeblack! Study Society, my love, or else do not come into it at all. To live like De Quincey or Wordsworth is comprehensible, though I should fancy it very uncomfortable. But a middle way is idiotcy. You only please *neither* the Hermits nor Vanity Fair.'

'Is it so very necessary to please anybody?'

Lady Cardiff shrugged her shoulders.

'That depends, my dear, on one's own desires. I should say it was very necessary; Mrs. Henry V. Clams would say so, Lady Joan would say so, all Society would say so. But I'm sure I daren't say it is for you. You don't seem to care for all we care for; I believe Society seems to you no better than a Flemish kermesse.'

'Not half so good! At a kermesse the children at least are genuine, with their gilded cakes and their merry go-rounds. In our society the very children are *blasés* before they are in their teens. Little Nadine Apraxine was invited to luncheon when I was with her the other day; she is eight years old. She came up to her mother and whispered, "Make an excuse

for me; I don't wish to go; their cook is not good."'

'A discerning child,' said Lady Cardiff with approval. 'An admirable child; I wish she was my grand-daughter. She will have a future, that child; as for the rest of us, I am sure our cakes are gilt, my dear, we won't touch them if they aren't; and we go round and round on the same wooden horse, God knows, every year of our lives; we are very like the kermesse after all. And we do enjoy ourselves, you are mistaken if you think we don't; perhaps things look blue in the morning, that comes of the champagne and the chloral; but by the time we get "done up" and begin our visits, we are really enjoying ourselves, and go on doing it till the small hours. *Blasé*, of course, everybody is in a sense, but there's always some ammonia to smell of, that wakes us up; when we're young the ammonia is coquetry, when we're old it's scandal. When we've got our eyebrows neatly drawn, and our eyes nicely washed with kohl, and are ready for the kermesse, we jump on one or other of the wooden horses, and away we go

to a "rosy time," as the racing men say. I don't think people get tired; not in your sense: bless you, little Nadine Apraxine will never tire of finding that her friends' cooks are bad, till she hasn't a tooth left that isn't a false one to mumble her dinner. The joy of disparagement never dies till we die. There are two things that nobody ever tires of, they are the pleasures of excelling and of depreciating.'

'Excelling!—it is rather a Dead Sea apple, I fear. The effort is happiness, but the fruit always seems poor.'

Lady Cardiff could not patiently hear such nonsense.

'There you are again, my dear feminine Alceste,' she said irritably, 'looking at things from your solitary standpoint on that rock of yours in the middle of the sea. *You* are thinking of the excelling of genius, of the possessor of an ideal fame, of the "Huntress mightier than the moon," and *I* am thinking of the woman who excels in Society—who has the biggest diamonds, the best *chef*, the most lovers, the most *chic* and *chien*, who leads the fashion, and condescends

when she takes tea with an empress. But even from your point of view on your rock, I can't quite believe it. Accomplished ambition must be agreeable. To look back and say, "I have achieved!"—what leagues of sunlight sever that proud boast from the weary sigh, "I have failed!" Fame must console.'

'Perhaps; but the world, at least, does its best that it should not. Its glory discs are of thorns.'

'You mean that superiority has its attendant shadow, which is calumny? Always has had, since Apelles painted. What does it matter if everybody looks after you when you pass down a street, what they say when you pass?'

'A malefactor may obtain that sort of flattery. I do not see the charm of it.'

'You are very perverse. Of course I talk of an unsullied fame, not of an infamous notoriety.'

'Fame now-a-days is little else but notoriety,' said Etoile with a certain scorn, 'and it is dearly bought, perhaps too dearly, by the sacrifice of the serenity of obscurity, the loss of the peace of private life. Art is great and precious, but the

pursuit of it is sadly embittered when we have become so the plaything of the public, through it, that the simplest actions of our lives are chronicled and misconstrued. You do not believe it, perhaps, but I often envy the women sitting at their cottage doors, with their little children on their knees: no one talks of *them*!'

'J'ai tant de gloire, ô roi, que j'aspire au fumier!'

said Lady Cardiff. 'You are very thankless to Fate, my dear, but I suppose it is always so.'

And Lady Cardiff took refuge in her cigar case, being a woman of too much experience not to know that it is quite useless to try and make converts to your opinions; and especially impossible to convince people dissatisfied with their good fortune that they ought to be charmed with it.

'It is very curious,' she thought when she got into her own carriage, 'really it makes one believe in that odd doctrine of, what is it, Compensations; but, certainly, people of great talent always are a little mad. If they're not flightily mad with eccentricity and brandy, they are

morbidly mad with solitude and sentiment. Now, she is a great creature, really a great creature; might have the world at her feet if she liked; and all she cares for is a big dog, a bunch of roses, and some artist or poet dead and gone three hundred or three thousand years! It is very queer. It is just like that extraordinary possession of Victor Hugo's; with powers that might have sufficed to make ten men brilliant and comfortable, he must vex and worry about politics that didn't concern him in the least, and go and live under a skylight in the middle of the sea. It is very odd. They are never happy but when they are unhappy; and if you tell them that Addison could be a great writer, and yet live comfortably and enjoy the things of this world, they only tell you contemptuously that Addison had no genius, he had only a Style. I suppose he hadn't. I think if I were one of them and had to choose, I would rather have only a Style, too.'

That night Lady Cardiff went to a very big dinner at Mrs. Henry V. Clams'; the dinner which Etoile had declined. Fontebranda had

arranged it as he arranged everything, from the ball she once gave an Imperial Prince to the tisane she took when she caught a chill; and on this night it was an unspeakably grand affair, all ablaze with princes and ministers.

'We married women have a good time out here,' Mrs. Henry V. Clams, in her dressing-room a few hours before, wrote to a sister in the States. 'If I'd stayed at home I'd have been set away among the old folks long ago; girls are all the go in New York; in Europe, girls aren't nowhere; it's right down horrid to see 'em, batches and batches of 'em, and not a man to waltz with 'em if there's a married woman got a clean place on her ticket. You should see Heloise B. Dobbs, you remember her shooting that fine young man in St. Louis: she's fifty, as you know, if she's an hour; my dearest dear, she wears lower dresses than any of us, half a foot below the shoulder blades, and you'll leave her spinning like a steam-wheel in the cotillon if you slope off any minute before day-dawn.'

And Mrs. Henry V. Clams, having poured so much truth into the bosom of her sister in

New York, had herself arrayed in white taffetas, embroidered in silver with rosebuds and humming-birds, and with humming-birds on her shoulders, humming-birds in her hair, and humming-birds on her shoes, went down to her big dinner, and met Mrs. Heloise B. Dobbs, who with a narrow strap about her waist, and an infinitesimal strap over each shoulder, made up in diamonds what she lacked in dress, and each cried to the other, 'My dearest dear! How lovely you look!' and each thought of the other —'The Jezabel! the girls would lynch her down home!'

The dinner was a great success; all that Mrs. Henry V. Clams did was a success, thanks to Fontebranda. Comet clarets, Highland salmon, pines from Covent Garden, and everything else from Paris, was Alberto Fontebranda's recipe for making Society smile, and Society always smiled very sweetly. Mr. Henry V. Clams sometimes, paying the bills, did not smile; but then nobody minded what he did or did not.

'What 'd you bring me to Europe for if I aren't to make a figger in it?' said his wife very

sensibly. 'It's puffectly daft to cry out as you do; you can't make a figger for nothing, and your pile's as big as the Catskills!'

And Mr. Henry V. Clams was silenced, because it was sweet to him also to make a figure, only vicariously, and to entertain princes, even if they never distinguished him from his footmen.

He made a struggle once to sit at the bottom of his own table, but resigned even that because Fontebranda told him contemptuously, '*Tout cela, c'est changé maintenant, passé de mode tout à fait!*'

Mr. Henry V. Clams felt that in New York he would have tried a playful six-shooter on his familiar friend Fontebranda.

But he was in Europe, and wished to make a figure. So, without disputing, he sat at the side, and felt incongruous and jostled, and could never be brought to understand that his wife being opposite to him, the sides were the top and the bottom; but he had to sit there, and supposed it was Fashion. She had always Fontebranda on her left hand, and some illustrious being on her right; that was Fashion too.

Mr. Henry V. Clams would have been happier eating devilled tomatoes in Delmonico's.

When the great dinner was over, and the big bow-wow folks (as Mrs. Henry V. Clams would call them sometimes when her spirits were high and her Fashion forgot) were all departed, Mr. Henry V. Clams, bowing on the top of his stairs, and being supposed by most to be a groom of the chamber too nervous for his place, the inner life of the Palazzo Clams came coyly from its hiding-place out on to the hearth, that is to say, whisky, rum, and 'pick-me-ups' were rolled in with card-tables; cigar-boxes were opened, and a little roulette-wheel began to turn for those who liked it.

A dozen people, intimate friends, remained, and the host and hostess were always willing to lose their money for those who helped them to make a figure. Mr. Henry V. Clams rattled the napoleons in his trousers pocket, spat furtively into a Swiss *jardinière*, drank a choice drink called 'wake-the-dead,' and began to feel once more an independent citizen.

'Alberto,' said his wife.

'*Ma très-chère?*' responded Fontebranda.

'That's been a big thing!'

'*Bien réussi, chère, mais oui.*'

'But there's one thing riles me, right down riles me,' said Mrs. Henry V. Clams, also sipping the 'wake-the-dead.'

'I know,' said the voice of her husband solemnly. 'The canvas-backs wanted green ginger. I guess you don't get ginger green in this country?'

The idiotcy of this remark passed unnoticed, because no one ever noticed his remarks unless it was absolutely necessary to reprove or instruct him.

'Riles!' echoed Fontebranda. '*Cela veut dire*—riles?'

'*Qui m'agace*,' explained Mrs. Henry V. Clams, pronouncing it with a fine breadth of tone as 'mag-ass.' '*Qui m'enrage!* There was a German serene, a Russian own cousin-to-the-throne, a French marshal, an English peeress, two embassies, and the Lord knows how many of your own dukes and princes, Alberto, and yet with all those that woman wouldn't come?'

'Woman? woman? *Mais qui donc?*' said the Count Alberto, staring hard over his halo of smoke.

'Etoile!'

'Bah!' said Fontebranda, with scorn.

'Oh, you may "bah!"' retorted his sovereign mistress as she threw her own cigarette fiercely into a cluster of azaleas. 'It riles me; it makes me downright mad! Are those first-class prize-trotters to dine here, and that one-horse concern, *an artist*, to say no?'

Lady Joan Challoner, who was lying back in an arm-chair smoking, with Ioris on one side of her, and Eccelino di Sestri and Douglas Græme on the other, took her cigar out of her teeth, and smiled pleasantly.

'Dear Mrs. Clams, what can it matter? I think she showed good feeling, for once. I wish she'd showed as much for us, and never brought her letters to me!'

The face of Ioris grew paler even than was its wont, and his brows contracted, as he sat on the arm of her chair.

He was silent, and was ashamed of his silence.

He felt false to his fairest faith; he felt a coward and untrue, yet his lips remained closed.

Mrs. Henry V. Clams, whose spirits were high, owing to the success of her 'big thing,' and the draught of the 'wake-the-dead,' threw one knee over the other comfortably as she leaned back in her chair, and smoked her cigarette.

'Dear Lady Joan, now, do tell!' she said confidentially. 'Come now, do tell; we're all *ong intim* here, and nobody 'll go and say anything. Who was she? do tell! I'll bet you know.'

Lady Joan looked sorrowful, and settled the spilla in her hair.

'N—no, I don't,' she said slowly. 'At least, you know, not positively, and I don't want to do her any harm, why should I? Of course I've heard a good many stories, who hasn't? but artists are always like that, you know, and of course she could not be the anatomist she is without—well, without very queer studies. Look how she must have studied the nude! Been in the most horrible anatomical museums and academies. No doubt must have been!' she said n conclusion, with a touching modesty, though

on some occasions she vowed she despised all Prudes, and had hung up behind her seat at her dinner table a most unblushing and colossal Nudity, which she called Titian's 'Choice of Paris.' But then these trifling incongruities never disturbed her: she knew that Mrs. Grundy does not mind a few incongruities.

Besides, Titian lived ever so long ago: nobody can help what *he* painted.

And then (which made such a difference also) the nudity was the joint property of herself and Mimo and Trillo—a gigantic speculation bought between them, just when the Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts was expected from St. Petersburg. The Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts was not impressed with the nudity, and would not buy it for the Hermitage, so it still hung behind the Lady Joan at dinner, waiting some more enlightened Inspecteur, or some billionnaire, come out of a foundry, or a lead mine, with a love of the arts.

'Oh, my! that's real shocking!' said Mrs. Henry V. Clams, awed by the word 'anatomical.' She was not sure what it meant; it was vaguely

associated in her mind with a travelling showman in the Far West, who had gone about with a skull, and some monstrosities in glass bottles, and a dried alligator out of the swamps.

'But that don't tell us who she was,' she pursued, her thirst of curiosity stimulated by a second draught of the 'wake-the-dead.'

'Oh, as for that,' said the Lady Joan, with a fine carelessness, 'it wouldn't matter who she was, if she'd always lived decently. I can tell you who she was, if you care about it so much. She was a little girl picked off the streets by old Istrion—you know, the French painter—her mother was an "unfortunate," and Istrion tumbled over the child on the sill of a wine-shop. That's the simple truth. But of course that wouldn't matter, if when she'd grown up she'd kept straight.'

Lady Joan blew some smoke into the air after this performance of her imagination. She had invented it quite on the spur of the moment, and felt that hours of reflection could not have enabled her to hit on anything better. She saw the face of Ioris pale, eager, and almost stern, as

he strove to listen, but she spoke in her own tongue, rapidly, and he failed to follow her.

'That is the real truth,' she added, 'because a great friend of old Istrion's told me; he'd seen the child, a dirty little brat, tumbling about in the old man's atelier when Istrion first took her home.'

'Oh, my!' said Mrs. Henry V. Clams again, almost gasping from the effects of her surprise and the 'wake-the-dead.' 'Oh, my! And yet she gives herself such highfalutin' airs! Well, I *do* like that! My word, I'd like to tell her!'

Lady Joan looked at her hostess and at all her other listeners with an honest, frank light in her steadfast eyes.

'Well, you know, I, for one, would never reproach her with that. Could she help what she was born? What I do dislike knowing her for is, that though certainly she has a certain amount of talent, she never would have been heard of if she hadn't been much too indulgent to certain great persons who can give fame with their nod; and I know that half—more than half—of the accuracy

and the beauty of her pictures, and in consequence all their celebrity, are due to the talent of an obscure lover of hers, a certain Pierre Gérarde, a great colourist, who works them up and lets them go out in her name. It is so vilely dishonest, you know; it really hurts one to think of it.'

'Lord! then even her pictures aren't her own!' gasped Mrs. Henry V. Clams, in the extremity of her stupefaction resorting once more to the 'wake-the-dead.'

Mr. Henry V. Clams, listening on the hearth, spit softly once more into the azaleas.

'Uncommon kind of that young man,' he said drily. 'That young man must be a real Christian. Where was he riz, that very liberal young man, my lady?'

Lady Joan coloured a little.

'He is a Belgian, I believe,' she said hurriedly. 'But everybody knows it perfectly well in Paris.'

'Then they must be darned fools in Paris to make a fuss over the wrong critter,' said Mr. Henry V. Clams. 'I believe they've a prize for

Virtue: they oughter crown that most uncommon young man.'

'Hold your tongue, Mr. Clams, and don't be so vulgar,' said his wife, whilst Fontebranda, weary of a conversation in a tongue he could not comprehend, effected a diversion by rolling up the roulette-table a little nearer.

Lady Joan, who never gambled—she liked nothing that was uncertain—took her leave and went home with her friend.

Ioris never spoke. He had not very clearly understood, but he had gathered the drift of her words enough to feel angered with her and ashamed of himself. In silence they rolled through the dark midnight towards the Casa Challoner. Lady Joan was wondering if she had gone too far in the brilliant invention of Pierre Gérarde, but she was not much afraid. She knew that a lie makes so many friends: it is such a common pastime, and begets such a fellow-feeling in everybody. When a lie is found out, nobody is so angry with the teller of it as everybody is with the worrying and uncompromising truth-teller—*he* is a bore if you like.

'A cullender is not hindered by a hole more or less,' says the Eastern proverb, and she knew that Society likes cullenders—if you will only pour dirty water through them.

Looking at the profile of Ioris in the uncertain, faint gleam of the light from the lamps, she mutely debated within herself whether she might translate her fiction of Pierre Gérarde and try it on him. But on reflection she desisted: he might go and tell Etoile. They drove home in an unbroken silence.

'Aren't you coming up, Io?' she said in surprise as he turned away from her at the bottom of her own staircase.

'No!' said Ioris curtly. 'And I think—I think, *ma chère*, that you might respect the names of those who are your guests and take your hand in friendship—that is all. *Felicissima notte!*'

She, stupefied with amazement and choked with rising fury, stood under the rays of her staircase lamp, gazing into the vacancy of the dark entrance-hall, as the dull sound of the closing door echoed through the house and woke

Mr. Challoner, sleeping the sleep of the just and dreaming dreams of the Share List.

'My God! does he care for her?' she thought. In the dull midnight a new light broke in upon her; but it could not pierce very far through the triple folds of her own supreme vanity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next day was stormy and cold.

The mild and sunny weather which had graced the Carnival was passing away as the Carnival drew to its close, and the bitter winds were sweeping in from the ravines of Abruzzi and Apennines, and driving the brown Tiber into sullen swell.

Ioris came out of his house in the teeth of the wind, and felt weary and chilly. He had been sitting in his own room under the watchful eyes of the portrait there, and striving to wade through a mass of papers, in the vain endeavour to understand his own position and responsibilities in regard to those mighty international

works by the Gulf of Faro to which he had been persuaded to put his name. All that he could thoroughly understand was that his money was sinking into the sands of Faro, as the piles were sinking there.

That he had lost money was usually the only clear conviction that remained to him as a result of all the enterprises into which he was launched. That he would not let others lose money, through him or by him, was the only resolve, strong enough and fixed enough in his mind, to resist all the influences that were around him and that laboured to shake it in him. The conviction and the resolve together were not peaceful mental food. He was not used to thought of this kind; his past was full of very different memories.

To lead a cotillon at the Tuileries, to fight a duel at the frontier, to string a guitar in a moonlit garden, to study painting in an old Academy, to woo the beauty of a court, to talk music with the Abbé Liszt, to exchange courtly ceremonials with cardinals, to rove through Alpine valleys with a hunter king—these made

up a life like a Boccaccio story, like a pageant-picture of Carpaccio or Bordone indeed, but they were no meet preparation for the lore of the financial world, for the gambling of the board-room and the share market.

The dizzy figures made his eyes ache, the endless letters made his brain dull. He knew what ruin meant, and something that was not unlike ruin looked at him from the columns of numerals, from the piles of correspondence. He knew also that on his estate the columns of loss and of profit were far from equal; that in the matter of Fiordelisa, expenditure was not met by any return; every pineapple cost him about fifty francs, and every pineapple was given away to some friend—not his own. The pineapples were a sample of the rest.

He sat and studied the dreary figures that filled sheet after sheet, from the bills paid for the pineapple-beds to the accounts for the bridge by the Gulf of Faro, and he felt bewildered and wearied. With a sword, with a paint brush, with a crabbed musical score, with an abstruse Italian or Latin poem, with a tender woman's

hand stealing into his own, he would have known what to do; but with accounts and with finance!

Ioris rose, having wasted his day, and having no surer idea of what he was committed to in the present, or of what he had better do in the future, than if he had never wasted a morning of freedom over those hateful masses of arithmetic and correspondence. His head ached and his heart ached too.

He was free, for his tyrant was gone, on the arm of handsome Douglas Græme, with Silverly Bell as Propriety, to a classical concert given for a charity by Lady Annie Monmouthshire at her rooms in her hotel; and, the concert ended, was to dine with the Dean of St. Edmund's, at the same great hotel, in that decorous attention to the decorums of the world which no passion, pleasure, or naughtiness ever made the Lady Joan omit, any more than passion, pleasure, or naughtiness made ladies of the Borgian era neglect their fasts or fail to make their plenary confession.

By mere instinct as he left his house, fatigued and out of spirits, his steps bore him down the crowded Corso to the old palace on the Horses'

Hill, where so much of the stifled romance and resolve of his vanished youth seemed to arise for him as he crossed its threshold.

In an earlier time he had always made some excuse to his conscience; some painting, some book, some flower, some gallery hard of access, for which he brought admittance, some treasure of art unknown to the general student, of which he brought tidings; but for some time he had now neglected to use these pleas, unless interrogated by his tyrant, and he entered the house of Etoile familiarly and so frequently that the servants had ceased to go through any formula, and threw the doors open to him without bidding.

To-day it was five o'clock. Etoile was out, but would be home in a few moments, so they said. He went in, and cast himself on a couch and waited.

The silence, the fragrance, the soft shadows of the room soothed him; the dog lying asleep, looked up and welcomed him lazily, then slept again; there were wet sketches, open books, fresh flowers, countless things that spoke to him as if they had voices of their absent mistress.

He took up a volume that lay face downwards near him.

It was the *Nélida* of Daniel Stern.

It was open at that true and eloquent passage which seems to vibrate with the deep scorn of a courageous nature for the careful egotism of a cowardly one.

'*Marcher environnée des hommages que le monde prodigue aux apparences hypocrites; jouir à l'ombre d'un mensonge de lâches et furtifs plaisirs; ce sont là les vulgaires sagesses de ces femmes que la Nature a faites également impuissantes pour le bien qu'elles reconnaissent et pour le mal qui les séduit; également incapables de soumission ou de révolte, aussi dépourvues du courage qui se résigne à porter des chaînes que de la hardiesse qui s'efforce à les briser.*'

'It is a portrait of Joan,' thought Ioris, and put the book down impatient to be reminded of what, here, he desired to forget. Yet it moved him to pleasure to think that Etoile had been reading it; a pencil line scored by the passage told him that she also must have been thinking

of '*ces vulgaires sagesses*' of the woman who claimed his allegiance, and perhaps been resenting them for his sake.

It was sweet to his sense of power to know that she should care thus; it gave him a fuller consciousness of triumph to feel that this woman, so long above all human envies and enmities, stooped to both through his influence and for his sake. And he mis-read in a measure the emotions that moved her. Though in a sense, jealousy of the woman who had absorbed and charmed his life, it was far more a scornful impatience of the vice that cloaked itself as virtue, of the timorous time-serving that loved the world better than passion or candour. The contempt of the courageous temper for the coward's is seldom understood; the impatience of courage for the craven meanness of a lie is seldom rightly measured.

Ioris thought she was jealous as other women were; but he was wrong.

'Dear me!' said the voice of Lady Cardiff at that instant on the threshold of the chamber. Although a person who was never surprised at

anything, she was so surprised to see him there that the ejaculation escaped her.

'How very much at home he looks, more than he ever does in the other place,' she thought to herself, as Ioris rose to meet her with that gay and graceful greeting which so well became him.

'My dear Prince, charmed to see you. I only looked in for five minutes; they said she'd be here in a moment; pretty rooms, aren't they? and what quantities of flowers, headaching, but pretty,' said Lady Cardiff, as she seated herself on a couch opposite to him, and took out her cigarette case. 'Will you have one? Don't she let you? She let's me. Horrid weather; isn't it? I have just come from Lady Anne's concert: they have been tuning their instruments two hours; at least I thought it was tuning their instruments; but they said it was Op. 101st: Motifs on B flat. Very beautiful they said. Queer thing, isn't it, that all the pretty things that please one are all irretrievably wrong, and everything that set's one's teeth on edge, and scratches through one's brain like a metallic tooth comb, are all scientifically exquisite. I

don't profess to understand it; I suppose nightingales are all wrong, aren't they? And yet one likes to hear them. Myself, I prefer a nightingale to Op. 101st. Your friends, the Challoners, were there; at least the lady was; she it was who told me that it was Op. 101st.'

'Lady Joan is fond of music,' said Ioris, feeling irritated beyond endurance at the bare mention of a name that in this hour he had hoped peacefully to forget.

'Oh, that's being fond of music, is it? to shoot the nightingales, and like Op. 101st. She does shoot the nightingales up at your place, doesn't she? I've heard so. But I'm sure *you* like the birds better than the metallic tooth comb, don't you?'

'I am a countryman of the melodists,' said Ioris, with a smile. 'I plead guilty to thinking the delight of the ear the first charm of all music; you know it is a rococo opinion scorned by all modern science.'

'Oh, I know; I know,' said Lady Cardiff. 'The nightingales are to be summoned before School Boards, I believe, and educated out of

their perverse trick of being harmonious; ours is a delightful age; each of us is merely an egg, or an atom, or a gas (*il n'y a pas beaucoup à choisir.* I think the egg's the least humiliating of the three), and Thought is only a mere secretion like bile, and Mind is only a greyish sort of sponge under the skull, and it is only an accidental crease in the sponge that makes it a Genius, a crease another way would have made it an idiot; and yet poor wretches, as we are made up of only gas and a creased sponge, we are required to be capable of appreciating Op. 101st! Now that is really absurd, you know. Don't you think so? By the way, how did the gas-and-sponge that we unhappy accidents of evolution call the Count Milliadine, get on at the court to-day? Is he liked?'

The Count Milliadine was a new Russian Minister who had been officially received that morning; Ioris had conducted the reception; *apropos* of the reception Lady Cardiff plunged into politics, which she thought much more diverting than Op. 101st.

Ioris, who himself thought even Op. 101st

less odious than politics, suited himself to her mood with that gracious adaptability of which he had learned the trick at courts, but Lady Cardiff, to her amusement, saw his eyes ever and again turning to a Louis Quinze clock on its bracket.

In a quarter of an hour's time Etoile returned from her drive, and brought a fragrance of fresh gathered violets into the chamber with her; she had been in the Dorian Woods with Princess Vera and her children.

Lady Cardiff watched the silent greeting exchanged between her and Ioris, affecting herself to be entirely engrossed with a fusee that would not strike.

'Ah, ah,' thought she, wise in such signs, and swift to read them. 'That is it, is it? Well, why not? Only there will be the very mischief to pay in the other place. And will he be strong enough to battle through rough weather? A bully like that dear woman that loves Op. 101st wants *such* a bully to beat her!'

Aloud, she only said:—

'Dear me, how tiresome these fusees are.

Cher Prince, have you a light? a thousand thanks. Violets! what a quantity, but how unpleasantly wet. You can buy them at the street corner—not the same thing as gathering them? No? Now I should have fancied it much more agreeable. But that is one of the things that are like Op. 101st to me. You didn't hear about Op. 101st? I have been telling Ioris; I thought they hadn't finished tuning the fiddles, and it seemed the concert was over when I didn't know it had begun. Oh, thanks, my love—no—I must go really. I only waited for you ten seconds, because I wanted to hear about, &c., &c.'

And she proceeded to explain some errand about a book of French memoirs promised to some Russian invalid; a mere nothing. She had come, intending to have an hour's comfortable chat over the fire in twilight; but she comprehended that one at least of them was wishing her absent, and Lady Cardiff was too sympathetic and too well-bred not to catch a situation in a glance and conform herself to its exigencies at all personal sacrifice. She bowed herself out with admirable tact, just staying long enough to look

hurried and forced to go—quite naturally—and Ioris took her to her carriage.

'Dear me!' said Lady Cardiff, to herself, once more, when alone amidst her cushions. 'There *will* be the mischief to pay with a vengeance. What a pity he is hampered like that!—such a nice-looking man and such admirable manners, in a day when manners are scarcely more than a tradition, and everybody shuffles about in slippers, slippers that are down at heel too for the most part. What a pity! There is nothing in the world so hard to get rid of as the nineteenth-century Guinevere, when she has made a domestic animal of the marital dragon, and knows that Arthur will never say anything unless Launcelot seems likely to leave her on his hands. Poor Launcelot! If he ever do get into the newspapers everybody is horrified at him, and full of sympathy for the dragon, but it is Launcelot that is to be pitied—fifty to one Guinevere threw herself at his head, went down to his rooms, wrote to him at his club, did all kinds of silly things, and when she grew theatrical threatened him with Arthur. I shouldn't in the

least wonder if even Mr. Challoner were to grow into the "wronged Pendragon" if ever they find out that Guinevere has to clear out of Fiordelisa.'

And Lady Cardiff settled herself amongst her cushions, and tried to read a *Journal pour Rire*, by the fading light of the day, as her carriage rumbled through the streets of Rome, but failed to be able to keep her mind to it, partly from want of light, partly from wonder as to the sentiments she had detected.

'The "wronged Pendragon" will be very fine,' she thought to herself. 'It will be so very fine if only by contrast with Arthur's "boundless trust!"'

And the idea amused her much more than did the *Journal amusant.*

Meantime Ioris had returned to the rooms that the wet violets were filling with their fragrance.

Etoile had thrown aside her furs, and stood with the firelight playing on her uncovered head and the straight folds of her velvet skirt as she placed the violets in old shallow porcelain bowls, the dog lying at her feet.

'They were the last of the year, I fear,' she said to him, as he returned. 'The tulips are all out under the oak woods to-day. I care most for the violets. I remember how bitterly I used to cry when I was a little child, and our old servants threw them into syrups to boil them down —to buy them at street corners seems nearly as bad. Do you understand, or is it all Op. 101st to you?'

'I understand,' he said, with a smile and a sigh. 'May I stay here a little while? I am tired. Figuratively, I have been at street corners all the day, buying and selling. I feel dull, chilly, and jaded. May I stay?'

'Of course,' the colour flushed her face a little. She went on putting the violets in their shallow bowls beside the hearth. His eyes dwelt on her with musing tenderness, and followed the movements of her hands under their old lace ruffles amongst the forest flowers with the water drops sparkling on her fingers like diamonds.

'Why do you wear no rings?' he asked, abruptly.

She laughed a little.

'Vanity! They spoil the hand; they disguise it.'

'That is a sculptor's idea; I think it is a right one. Your hands are too beautiful to need ornament——'

'Or compliment.'

'Truth is not compliment. I never use the language of compliment to *you*; you know that very well. Tell me—you have been reading that book of Daniel Stern's?—*Nélida*?'

'Yes. It is not a very clever book, though written by a clever woman. But——'

'It has one passage that is eloquent. Did you think of me when you marked it?'

'Yes.'

He stretched his hand out to the book and read the passage again, in silence. Then with a sigh he tossed it away.

'She might have sat for the picture,' he said, with contempt.

'It is not right of *you* to say that!' Etoile said quickly, with a sense of pleasure in his wrong-doing that she blamed, for which she was impatient and scornful of herself. 'It is like

her, no doubt; it is like ten thousand other women probably; it is like all the feeble passions of the world which wear the cloak of convenience and the mask of a vulgar wisdom; but it is not for you to say so, since you bear with her as she is.'

'Why? since we are speaking with our hands in the *Bocca della Verità* to-night?' said Ioris, his voice hissing a little between his teeth. 'And, even if cowardly it be, you know very well slaves are always cowards; their tyrants make them so, and cannot complain. No!' he said quickly, changing his tone to a soft supplication, 'Do not say cruel things to me. I cannot bear them from you. Perhaps I am ignoble and unmanly. Before you I feel so.'

'It is not before me. It is before yourself,' she said in a low voice, as she returned to the hearth, and stood in the flickering light from the burning logs. 'Your name is noble; not only with the mere nobility of rank, but with all the inherited nobility of knightly actions and of chivalrous tempers; because the material greatness of your house may have vanished, that is but a reason the more to sustain it high in the

respect of the world and the honour of men; you are not free to be ridiculed, you are not free to be despised; you represent the honour of a thousand years of knighthood that stands or falls with you. It is not before me that you should feel your self-surrender to an ignoble passion shameful; it is before yourself and before the memory of your forefathers!'

Ioris listened, with his head bent and his eyes drooped.

'No other woman ever spoke to me like that,' he said, under his breath; and was silent, leaning his arm on the old yellow marble of the mantelpiece.

'It should not be what women say; it should be what your own heart tells you. You have so much heritage of greatness in your old race, so many memories to incite and ennoble you; your country people love you and you love them; there are so many beautiful possibilities in your own future; your life on your own lands might be——'

'When my future is her prey, as the present is, and every rood of my land is blighted by

her!' he muttered wearily. 'Ah, you do not understand—once I too thought as you think, and dreamed of great things, or at least of a life not unworthy great memories; but Society eats away all nobility, and makes us shiftless, vacuous, worthless, and insincere as itself. What are women? Only delicate pretty triflers or mere beasts of prey, that excite our baser desires and teach us to stifle our higher natures, lest we should make them yawn. You will say it is unmanly to lay blame upon your sex. Perhaps it is. But before such a woman as you are, one learns to feel what men might be if women were more like you. You tell me it is cowardly to say that those words of that book describe the one woman who more than any other has dragged my life down to a low level, and laid it waste and barren of all hope. It is not her fault: she cannot help being what nature made her; no one can give more than they have in them. Yet it is the truth, the merest, coldest truth. What is her love for me beyond such passion as a tigress knows, and even so, for ever second to her worldly interests and worship of herself——'

'Hush, hush! It is not loyal——'

He laughed aloud.

'Loyal! I am as loyal to her as she to me. Believe me, in a guilty passion that dares the world there may be loyalty, because there may be strength; but in such an intrigue as hers and mine, public as marriage, yet steeped in hypocrisies of social lies, there can be no faithfulness, because to each other, to ourselves, and to Society, we are false: false in every caress, in every word, in every thought—a very hell of falsehood!'

'Hush!'

'Why? Let me speak the truth to you at least. No woman ever influenced me as you do. I think you could make me what you would if I were always near you. You are like the flowers you love; you speak to men of the God they have forgotten. The flowers do not know what they do, neither do you. Are you offended? Forgive me.'

Etoile was silent for a moment.

'Offended? No; not that. But it is not just to her. Besides, you do not mean it.'

'Let her take care of herself; she is well able. Do I not mean what I say of you? Look at me and see.'

She did look at him with the calm, frank, candid regard with which she had looked always in the face of men. Their passions had never moved her, and she had controlled them or dismissed them without effort. Before the deep dreamy gaze of his eyes, caressing, ardent, mysterious with the veiled story of a passion he dared not avow, her own eyes fell; something in his look startled, troubled, hurt her.

'Prince Ioris,' she said coldly, 'it is half-past seven o'clock. They will be waiting for you at the Casa Challoner. You forget your duties.'

Ioris recovered himself and controlled his gaze.

'I do not return there to-night; I shall go home and dine alone.'

But he did not move to go; silence fell between them; he leaned against the old yellow marble by the hearth; the lids drooped over his tell-tale eyes.

A servant entered with the lamps. Her heart

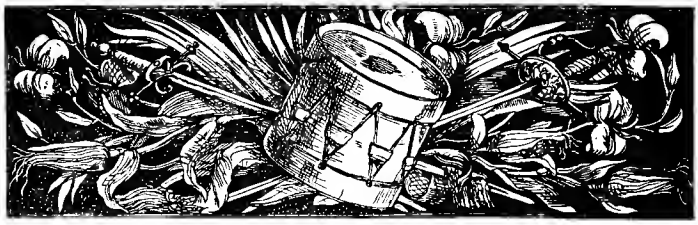
beat quickly; she feared she had been harsh to him.

The light seemed to fall on them as from a world they had forgotten.

'Will you dine here?' she said a little hurriedly. 'In half-an-hour I expect my old friend Voightel; he arrives from Paris. Yes? Stay then, and re-read *Nélida* while I go away and change my gown.'

He kissed her hands; left alone, it was not *Nélida* that he read, but the troubled story of his own heart.

Meanwhile he hoped that the snow on the Alps might detain Baron Voightel.



CHAPTER XXIV.

THE snow did not detain Baron Voightel; at ten minutes past eight o'clock he took his green spectacles, his grey beard, and his caustic wit into the rooms of Etoile, and seeing Ioris there, who looked very much at home, and had one of her tea-roses in his coat, thought to himself with a chuckle, '*A la bonne heure!* It always comes at last. What sort of man is he, I wonder, that can charm our Indifferentia?'

They had a very pleasant dinner that evening, and pleasant hours after it by the great wood fire, and Voightel could not have told that Ioris was wishing him deep in a snow-drift, for Ioris was at his gentlest, brightest, and most

graceful, and when at midnight they both took leave, accompanied Voightel to his hotel, and pressing both his hands, declared the gratification and honour that he felt in becoming acquainted with the mighty traveller.

'A charming person—beautiful manners and an historic face,' thought Voightel; nevertheless he shook his head as he went up the stairs of his hotel.

Voightel was bound for Brindisi, and had only some thirty-six hours to pass in Rome; far away, in those wild untrodden lands which he loved, men, armed to the teeth, were waiting his leadership, and many a problem of unexplored tracks and unnavigated lakes were awaiting his efforts to master them. A great expedition that the governments of three countries had combined to organise, had been put under his command, and he had no time to loiter and read a romance.

Voightel was a scholar, a savant, an explorer and a dweller in deserts, but he was an observer of men, a citizen of the world; he was old and tough, and shrewd and learned, and

could be very fierce; his alternate studies of civilised and barbaric life had disposed him to rate simple courage as high as a Lacedæmonian, and to be somewhat deaf and blind to the vast increase in excellencies of all sorts which modern manners claim.

On this subject he was whimsical, and to some hearers, extremely irritating. The more so as no one could deny that he had the amplest experiences of both extremes, which lent to his arguments that authoritative exactitude which exasperates the most patient opponent.

He was exasperating also in many other ways. He had an inconveniently long memory for all kinds of minutiæ; no lie imposed on him; and no hypocrisies succeeded with him. What was still more exasperating, he had a stout belief in innocence when he found it, and a profound contempt for the world's general ideas as to vice and virtue.

When Voightel went to bed that night he found a honeyed little note saying that, his impending arrival having been announced in the

journals, Mr. and Lady Joan Challoner besought him not to forget the sincerest and most devoted of his friends. Voightel, who was an ungrateful man, or at least everybody said so except those savage tribes whom he adored, twisted the note up, and lit his good-night pipe with it. But in the morning when Voightel had seen the king, a few ministers, and half a hundred archæologists and men of science, he found time to look in at the Casa Challoner, and was met with the most rapturous and cordial welcome, and many heart-rending regrets that he had only half-an-hour to bestow there.

It was five o'clock, and it chanced to be a Wednesday, and Lady Joan was surrounded by ladies; Voightel was terrible to Mrs. Grundy, because he had horrible ideas as to polygamy, and was also said to have eaten his own cabin-boy in cutlets in the Caribbean Isles.

But the Lady Joan, for once regardless of her Bona Dea, received him with an absolute adoration and ecstacy, insisted on his smoking, and pressed on him all the liqueurs ever made upon earth. Such a dear, dear old friend! Could she

ever forget his kindness in those delightful old days in darling Damascus!

Voightel took the petting, sipped the liqueurs, smoked in a circle of dowagers and damsels, and said with genuine good humour, 'We don't forget anything about Damascus, do we? What good *très-sec* you used to have, Joan, and how clever Horace Vere was in knocking the heads off the bottles. We used to shoot cats from the roofs, and crows too. You never missed aim in those days. Is your wrist steady now? Pleasant days they were; too pleasant! Poor Jack Seville!'

Lady Joan felt as if someone had poured ice water down her back, and was very effusive and ardent in pressing the liqueurs upon him.

'Just the same woman,' thought Voightel, eyeing her; 'just the same, only older; of course she's just the same; there are cats and crows here, and champagne; and I suppose dear Robert has a counting-house to be put away in somewhere.'

At that moment Ioris entered.

'Io, come and let me present you to the very

dearest friend I have in the world—a second father!' cried the Lady Joan.

'We met last night,' was on Voightel's lips, but he saw that Ioris bent gravely before him with the ceremonious grace of a perfect stranger. Voightel was old and shrewd; he could see a situation at a glance and guess a great deal in an instant; he seemed not to remember Ioris and felt that Ioris was grateful to him.

'Is he a great friend of yours?' Voightel said aside to Lady Joan. 'Ah! as great a friend as Jack Seville? Poor Jack! This man is handsomer; but then you have come into the land of living pictures. Jack only painted 'em.'

Lady Joan coloured and winced.

'Mr. Challoner farms Ioris's land,' she answered hurriedly. 'The Prince is very poor, you know, and Mr. Challoner is very fond of him.'

'Challoner was fond of poor Jack and of Horace too,' said Voightel, with an innocent meditation. 'Good creature your husband always was. So you farm, do you? Does it pay here? Nice country, but not remunerative, is it?'

'We don't do it for profit!' said Lady Joan almost sharply, she felt so sorely tried.

'What it is to live in a poetic country,' said Voightel; 'but the force of association is everything; when I ate that cabin-boy, whom I hear that admirable lady in a shabby purple gown over there talking about to her neighbour, he was just as agreeable to me as tender veal. It was all the force of association; my hosts liked him as well as veal; better even; so did I. No doubt in Pall-Mall I should hold fried cabin-boy in abhorrence. We are all the puppets of custom; don't you think so, madam?'

The lady in a shabby purple gown, who was Lady George Scrope-Stair, thus suddenly addressed, was too horrified to be able to answer him. ('I have heard him confess the fact myself,' said Lady George for ever afterwards.)

'Ah! he was a pretty boy, madam, and we ate him with nutmeg and caper sauce,' said Voightel, and rose and took himself away, his hostess following him on to the stairs.

Ioris under pretext to her of offering him an

umbrella, followed him into the street where it was raining a little.

'I did not seem to recognise you just now, my dear Baron,' he said, with his sweetest smile, 'because the Lady Joan had so often spoken of presenting me to you, that I did not like to deprive her of the pleasure by telling her she had been forestalled. She honours you so greatly.'

Voightel looked in his face through his green spectacles.

'I understand,' he said drily; they parted with elaborate courtesy on the pavement before the Casa Challoner.

Voightel felt that there was danger impending, and if his caravan had not been chartered, and his Arabs armed to the teeth, and his escort all waiting far away in the sand plains already, he would have stayed in Rome to see the romance unwind itself, and guide its threads if need be.

'A very handsome man, and charming, but weak, I fear,' thought Voightel. 'Not the man to have the courage of his opinions, I am afraid. I wish he did not act so prettily. I do not like pretty lies. Ugly ones are bad enough. A

pretty lie is like a poison in a rose; you die in perfume, but you die.'

Thereupon he betook himself to the house of Etoile. He had never in his life wished for any tie of the affections, but at that moment he wished that he had been her father, that he might have said—'Beware!'

As it was he dined with her, and felt his way very prudently, being sure of nothing.

'I saw your guest of last night, to-day,' he said carelessly after dinner.

'Yes?'

'Handsome man, very. I saw him at Joan Challoner's.'

Etoile was silent.

'He's her friend, isn't he?'

'They are great friends—yes.'

Voightel eyeing her sharply, chuckled.

'Ah! In a catalogue of their old masters, our beloved Forty Prudes of the London R.A. the other day put down "Portrait of Lady Hamilton, noted for her *friendship* with Nelson." Friendship is such an elastic word. There never was an age when it stood for so many things

in private, and was yet so absolutely non-existent in fact. Our dear Joan has had many such friends, though I don't think one ever let her farm for him before. What are his estates like?'

'They are large, but I should think not very profitable.'

'With Joan on them? Probably not.'

'Why did you go and see her if you don't like her?'

'My dear, she loves me.'

'Then you are very thankless.'

Voightel laughed.

'She seems to have grown very proper; admirably proper; she had got muffins and tea. In Damascus days it was champagne and caviare. I reminded her of Damascus days. Retrospection is always so delightful. I think she did not wish the Prince she farms for, to see too much of me. I wonder she lets you give him tea-roses. Oh, a thousand pardons; I meant nothing! Only I fancy my Lady Joan does not love you, and she is nasty when she is crossed. "*C'est un joueur contre qui ne rien perdre*

c'est beaucoup gagner." What was said of Tilly is as true of her. Oh, you need not look so tranquilly scornful, and indeed I suppose you will leave Rome very shortly, will you not? Embittered, is she? Yes, I daresay she may be. It is not nice to marry a Mr. Challoner, and sell teacups, and black Mrs. Grundy's shoes; not nice at all when one was born to better things, and it must naturally sour one. Why do I go and see her? It's the greatest service I can ever do her. It's just the same with her as it is with poor Tartar. Tartar can't say he's traced the Lost Waters and lived in the middle of Africa, with a pat of butter on his head for all his clothing, before *me*, when I left him funking at the coast, and have worn a pat of butter ten years myself. But for that very reason I dine with Tartar in any city I meet him in, out of pure christian charity. "Sharp old Voightel been dining with me," says Tartar; and people believe then in his pat of butter. "Dear old Voightel's been dining with me," says Lady Joan: and then people believe in *hers*. Besides, if one cut all the good-looking women that one knows something about, one

would never go out to dinner at all. It's just because I *do* know that she's so thankful to have a chance of being civil to me. And dining out is agreeable after the desert. Though I can live on pulse I have .a palate for oysters. Know all about her? To be sure I know all about her. Knew her in short frocks, and used to give her sugarplums: she spit at me when they weren't big enough. Dear, dear! Archie's daughter ought to have married a duke. How does she stand here? She's only scotched her early mistakes, not killed 'em. No woman ever can kill 'em. *Il n'y a que les morts qui ne reviennent pas*, and ugly stories never die. There's always somebody to keep them alive. Oh, of course she knows that I know everyone of her little slips,' he said in conclusion, with that chuckle of grim satisfaction. 'She is always delighted to see me, fills my pipe, and brings me the best Chartreuse, and don't lie more than once in ten minutes about her doings in the East and dear old Palmerston. She is talking Platonics and selling pictures now, they tell me: and gets people to believe in both. Dear me! well, the credulity of

human nature always was an unknown quantity. She's an artful dodger, our dear Joan, but there —there—one should never say anything.'

With which he stretched his legs and sipped his claret comfortably.

'Platonics and pictures,' he echoed, with a chuckle. 'A charming combination; very popular, I daresay. Bless my soul! I saw Ioris to-day again, as I told you; he did not seem to me to go well with the tea and the tea-cakes. He would have suited our moonlit roofs in Damascus much better. Ah! he'll never get away from *her*, you know. I can see his fate in his face. Jack Seville never would have got away if he hadn't died. The only man to have a chance with her would be a thoroughgoing bully—a bigger bully than she is. The only law she knows is "Faustrecht." But this man's a gentleman, and weak. There's no hope for him. He won't use the fist to her actually, or allegorically. Isn't that a sketch of him over there?'

'Yes.'

Etoile was angered to feel herself colour.

Voightel walked over to the easel, and stood there silently; then walked back again.

'Very like a Giorgione or a Titian; very historic face; you ought to paint him in a coat of mail. Lord! if he knew all I could tell him!' Voightel chuckled wickedly in his chair.

'But one should never say anything,' he repeated cautiously, hoping that his companion would ask him everything.

But Etoile made no sign; she tried, indeed, to change the conversation. The loyalty of her temperament made her averse to hearing any evil of a woman who still was—at least in Society's sense of the much-tried word—her friend.

Voightel, however, who loved to hear his own tongue, as was natural in a man who spent years in silence amidst unpeopled deserts, and then came back to Europe to have his speech listened to as an oracle's at princes' dinners and in public lecture-rooms—Voightel would not leave the subject, and cheerily puffed out with his smoke all he knew.

Voightel, who declared it was always best to

say nothing, said everything, in the usual contrast between theory and practice—said everything, with that chuckle of grim satisfaction with which human nature surveys human frailty; an echo of the laugh that Satan laughed behind the tree, and that Eve heard and never could forget, and so transmitted to her posterity; the laugh which Gounod has caught in the serenade of the *Dio dell' Or.*

Voightel laughed, with that laugh, as he told his Damascene recollections.

'Why do you take her pipe and her Chartreuse and tell me those things of her? It is unfair and ungenerous,' said Etoile, with some disgust and some impatience. To sit still and hear an enemy unjustly dealt with seemed to her an ungenerous meanness. Etoile had the old-fashioned idea that one should be even more scrupulous with a foe than with a friend. The whole theme, too, annoyed her, and made her ill at ease and dissatisfied with herself.

He rose to leave for his night-train for Brindisi; but his eyes were gloomy and troubled through his green spectacles.

'What are you so chivalrous for? The woman is your foe, or will be. My dear, the days of Fontenoy are gone out; everybody nowadays only tries to get the first fire, by hook or by crook. Ours is an age of cowardice and cuirassed cannon: chivalry is out of place in it.'

'There can be no reason why she should be ever anything except my friend,' said Etoile, with a certain defiance; but she felt that her voice was weak, and her colour changed as Voightel looked at the sketch on the easel.

'Of course, no reason in life,' he said drily. 'Only Archie and I were fools to send you to her. Well, she is an agreeable woman when she likes. Treat her as such; but keep her at arm's length. If you can buy a thousand francs' worth of lace of her, that will do to trim your maid's night-caps, do. It will not be dear at the price. You will not be able to sell it again for more than a thousand pence, but it will be cheap at the price A bowl of milk to a cobra is the better part of valour. It enables you to retreat unmolested. *Méfiez-vous toujours.* But indeed I suppose you and she can never have any quarrel, you are so

far apart; you are in the clouds, and she is busy among the steam mills. *Méfiez-vous*: that is all. And remember that she is a handsome woman, and a charming creature, and a dear soul; and, above all, she is Archie's daughter. Ah! that goes so far with so many of us! She is Archie's daughter; but all the same the less seen of her the better. Still, buy the lace—oh, yes—buy the lace; and if you can bring your mind to details, let it be some cotton rubbish off a village priest's surplice, and let her think you think it Doge's point of fifteen hundred. My dear, there is no money better laid out than what is spent in bowls of milk. You don't see it—no, you will never charm snakes, then: you will only get stung by them.'

And Voightel rose to go on his way to the lands of the sun; but as he left her he turned back and held out his hand once more to Etoile with trouble in his keen old eyes.

'*Méfiez-vous*! — remember that — remember that. But I wish I and Archie had not told you to come to her. And I wish you were safe out of Rome. If you *will* stay, buy lace enough, and

let her think you could get the French Government to purchase an early master for the Louvre. Oh, my dear, if you are so obstinate that you will not leave the swamp, and so foolhardy that you will not set a bowl of milk, bitten you must be. It is written.'

When he left her the tears stood in his old resolute eyes, that would have looked unwinking down the iron tubes of a line of muskets levelled against him.

He felt a vague fear of her future.

She, who had been her own destiny, and never believed in any force of fate or doom of destiny other than lies in the nature we are born with, felt also a dim shapeless apprehension. She sat long, thinking, beside her dying fire.

There are times when, even on the bravest temper, the ironical mockery, the cruel despotism of trifling circumstances, that have made themselves the masters of our lives, the hewers of our fate, must weigh with a sense of involuntary bondage, against which to strive is useless.

The weird sisters were forms of awe and magnitude proportionate to the woes they dealt

out, to the destiny they wove. But the very littleness of the daily chances that actually shape fate is, in its discordance and its mockery, more truly terrible and more hideously solemn—it is the little child's laugh at a frisking kitten which brings down the avalanche, and lays waste the mountain side, or it is the cackle of the startled geese that saves the Capitol.

To be the prey of Atropos was something at the least; and the grim *Deus vult perdere*, uttered in the delirium of pain, at the least made the maddened soul feel of some slender account in the sight of the gods and in the will of heaven. But we, who are the children of mere accident and the sport of idlest opportunity, have no such consolation.

All that Voightel had told her of this woman, whose friendship, as the world calls friendship, she had accepted, weighed on her with oppression and disgust.

'What is it to me?' she thought; and in vain told herself so.

It was much to her, because Ioris had grown to be much. She scarcely knew it, but the pity

she felt for him, the sympathy that he had appealed for, drew her heart towards him as it had never been drawn to any mortal creature. The passion of other men had annoyed, revolted, or wearied her, but his, speaking only as yet in his eyes and his voice, approaching her with soft hesitation, with a tender and almost timid grace, stole on her unawares and did not alarm her.

Ioris, swift to read all women, and incredulous of good faith in them, was perplexed, and yet impressed by the possibilities of passion, and the absolute absence of it, which he detected in her. Something of the exultation and the pride of an unparalleled conquest could, he felt, be the boast of the man who should become her lover.

'He was the first that ever burst into that silent sea.'

It would be like that Norse king's triumphant joy when the sharp prow cut through untraversed waters, and his sight ranged over untrodden shores.

He had made her first grow used to him and to his presence near her.

With the noonday chimes of the churches

and convents of Rome she had been almost sure from the first days of their acquaintance to hear the door unclose and his voice ask, '*Peut-on entrer?*' with the soft gladness in it of one who is sure that he is welcome.

Those sunny winter mornings; the dreamy smell of the burning pines; the blue sky beyond the window panes; the clusters of hot-house bloom full of soft colour; the vague sense of exhilaration and of languor which the Roman air carries in it—she rose to them all every day with the sweetest sense of happiness that had ever touched her life. They were all blent together confusedly and fragrantly, like her flowers in their baskets of moss. The days were soft and radiant, and she awoke to each with a new joy in her heart, that she thought was born of the new air and the new light, and of the immemorial earth around.

The first awakening of the artist in Italy is like the sudden blowing of a flower. All previous life seems but as a trance, sad-coloured and heavy with monotony. All that were hueless dreams before, take form and colour, and the

vaguest ideals all at once grow real. The hunger of the desire of the mind ceases, and a dreamy, ethereal content steals like music on a south wind over the intelligence, which ceases to question and accepts and enjoys.

Man never seems so great, nor God so near, nor mortal life so infinite, as here.

The immensity of the past serves to heighten the charm of the present. The very flower of human achievement has blossomed here from the tree of life. Beside the Sun God unscathed through two thousand years, Art ceases to seem vain. Beside the eternal well-spring of Egeria's fountain, passion may cheat itself into faith that it is immortal.

Art is strewn broadcast in the common ways, as the red tulips and the purple-capped anemones strew the common pastures; and passion is in the air, in the light, in the wind; it is in every burden of song down the still dark ways of the city, and in every shadow that falls on the lustrous white sheen of the fruit-scented fields. In other lands love may be an accident of life: in Italy it is life itself.

Now the breath of passing love-fancies which dulls the mirror of most women's souls had never passed over her. She had lived, so far as all love went, as untouched as any mountain flower that blows where no steps of men have ever wandered. Her heart was like a deep unruffled lake.

Passion must be remembered to be known, as the sun must be seen.

Men had wooed her with passion, sparing no pains. But a thousand lovers whom she rejects will teach a woman nothing. If they cannot waken her soul, or her senses, she will escape from them as ignorant and as emotionless as though she had dwelt all her days in a desert isle. One day there will come a touch which will tell her all; but till that comes she remains ignorant, because unmoved. The woman who has a hundred lovers, but who has not loved, is like a child that is blind. They tell her the sun is there, and she thinks she knows what manner of glory the sun's is. But, in truth, she knows nothing. She sits in the dark, and plays with vain imaginings, like the sightless child. She may pity the pain of a wasted passion, that is

all. The pity which is not born from experience is always cold. It cannot help being so. It does not understand.

'You know nothing of love,' Voightel had said to her one day years before in Paris. 'It is very strange, you, whom all the world thinks have had such a *jeunesse orageuse*, and whom so many men are willing to adore—you know no more of it than that white gardenia flower in your girdle.'

'Except in theory,' she answered him. 'I have read so much of it. It is the theme of the world—— '

'*Read!*' echoed the old wise man with scorn. 'Oh, child, what use is that? Read!—the inland dweller reads of the sea, and thinks he knows it, and believes it to be as a magnified duck-pond, and no more. Can he tell anything of the light and the shade; of the wave and the foam; of the green that is near, of the blue that is far; of the opaline changes, now pure as a dove's throat, now warm as a flame; of the great purple depths and the fierce blinding storm; and the delight and the fear, and the hurricane

rising like a horse snorting for war, and all that is known to the man who goes down to the great deep in ships? Passion and the sea are like one another. Words shall not tell them, nor colour pourtray them. The kiss that burns, and the salt spray that stings—let the poet excel and the painter endeavour, yet the best they can do shall say nothing to the woman without a lover, and the landsman who knows not the sea. If you would live—love. You will live in an hour a lifetime; and you will wonder how you bore your life before. But as an artist all will be over with you—that I think.'

CHAPTER XXV.

As Etoile sat by her fire, and the train bore Voightel southward and eastward through the snow, Ioris ascended the stairs of his prison-house.

It was ten o'clock; there was a ball for which his escort was commanded; he was dressed for the evening, some orders hung at his button-hole. His own sentiments were disregarded as to his orders.

'Decorations are out of place at private houses,' he had constantly urged; 'they should only be worn at courts and embassies. I assure you, *ma chère*, that anywhere else they are vulgar.'

'Put them on when you go with *me*,' said the Lady Joan sharply. She knew her own spheres and orbits better than he did: the bankers and consuls' wives, the small gentilities, and the free-born republicans, and all Shoddy in general, are very much impressed by any decorations.

The Lady Joan was alone when he entered, and was lying on her sofa. Mr. Challoner was sleeping the sleep of the just in an after-dinner doze in his own little room.

'How late you are, Io!' she cried, and lifted herself, and threw her arm about his throat.

He yielded, and felt ashamed.

His heart smote him for a sort of unfaithfulness. But it was not to her that he felt faithless.

'Why didn't you come to dinner?' she asked him, caressing his silky dark hair. 'Robert was as cross as a bear. You get very uncertain now. What do you do with yourself?'

'I have to be much oftener at the Court, and I spend so much time in that weary Messina Bureau,' said Ioris, and he sank down on a low stool, and leaned his forehead on her knee. He

felt weary, out of tune, impatient of himself and her. He felt a coward, and untrue.

Nevertheless, she was alone; the lamps burned low; the instincts of long habit were strong with him.

This passion had become a habit, and when passion and habit long lie in company it is only slowly and with incredulity that habit awakes to find its companion fled, itself alone.

The clock ticked on, the hours went by; she was happy, and he did not care to realise that he was false.

Midnight came. She left him to go to her room and change her attire, and came back radiant with black-and-gold woven Eastern stuffs and a train of amber silk, and bade him clasp her bracelets, and bade him see if the diamond spilla were set right in her braids.

'It's one o'clock. Let's be off, dear!' she said, as she thrust her hand into a glove; and he brought her satin cloak, and wrapped her up in it.

They went together through the quiet house and down the dusky stairs. Mr. Challoner was

still sleeping the sleep of the just, but by this time he was not in his den, but on his bed.

The jar of the closing house-door woke him; he turned comfortably, and thought how glad he was *he* had not to go out in the snow to a ball.

Their cab joined the long string of slowly-creeping carriages, and in due time they were set down, and went together into the palace, with its modern upholstery all ablaze with wax lights, and very much like a transformation scene in a pantomime, with its pink-tinted lamps and its paradise of palms.

This great ball was being given at the Anglo-American bankers', the Macscrips, who were very rich people, and always spent ten thousand francs on the flowers, and said aloud that they did so.

It was not the highest society that went to the Macscrips, but it was a kind of society that Lady Joan enjoyed very much better than the highest; a society that was reverential to her because she was a Perth-Douglas, that believed all she said about dear old Palmerston or any-

body else, and did not call in question her knowledge of the Arts—a society in which she could waltz all night, and talk about 'Io,' and feel that she was Somebody—as she never could feel with Princess Vera's contemptuous gaze on her, or under the inquisition of Lady Cardiff's eyeglasses.

She went up the crowded stairs and into the reception-room with Ioris behind her, and Mrs. Macscrip, who was a very censorious and particular little person, received her with delight.

'*So* kind of you! But where's dear Mr. Challoner? Is he not coming?'

'He's not very well to-night, but I've brought Io,' said the Lady Joan, nodding to a dozen acquaintances.

'Delighted—too kind of you—*charmée de vous voir, Prince!*' said Mrs. Macscrip, amidst a tide of incoming people that surged about her like sea-waves.

'*Toujours votre serviteur!*' murmured Ioris, with his perfect bow, that had been admired at Frohsdorff, at Vienna, and at the Court of Petersburg; and then followed the Lady Joan's black-

and-amber fan-shaped skirts, which were as a beacon from whose rays he must not stray.

She plunged into the delights of the evening, and he bore the weariness of it as well as he could.

He never danced. She danced all night. It was very tiresome to him to wade through the crush and heat of the thronged rooms, with the noise of the band, or the tongues of the chatterers, always dinning in his ear. He had been to so many of these things; alone, he would not have been amused amidst this mixed and second-rate society, but alone, he could at least have gone after leaning in a doorway twenty minutes. With her no such escape was possible.

To hold her fan, to offer his arm, to bow five hundred times, to murmur '*Comme vous êtes belle!*' to women he thought hideous, to say '*Enchanté de vous trouver!*' to bores he met every day; to be always at hand if she wanted to go and get an ice, or to see the lamp-lit garden, or to cross the room to a friend's sofa—these were his alternate diversions for six mortal

hours. It was a tedious martyrdom. He envied Mr. Challoner at home and asleep.

The sun was up when at last it pleased her to get into her cab and bid him light her a cigarette.

'You've been as dull as ditchwater all night, Io,' she said as she took it; 'and how pale you are! Now look at *me*. I'm as fresh as paint.'

He went home once more to his own house by the break of day, and threw himself on his bed, to court in vain the heavy slumber of morning. He was unhappy, and his conscience was ill at ease, and he could not lull it to rest with sophisms.

'*Avoir menti, c'est avoir souffert. N'être jamais soi, faire illusion toujours, c'est une fatigue. Etre caressant, se retenir, se réprimer, toujours être sur le qui-vive, se guetter sans cesse, chatouiller le poignard, sucrer le poison, veiller sur la rondeur de son geste et la musique de sa voix, ne pas avoir un regard—rien n'est plus difficile, rien n'est plus douloureux.*'

So wrote a great master; and so suffered Ioris.

In the early days of an illicit passion concealment is charming; every secret stairway of intrigue has a sweet surprise at its close; to be in conspiracy with one alone against all the rest of humanity is the most seductive of seductions. Love lives best in this soft twilight, where it only hears its own heart and one other's beat in the solitude.

But when the reverse of the medal is turned; when every step on the stairs has been traversed and tired of, when, instead of the heart's beat, there is but an upbraiding voice, when it is no longer *with* one but *from* one that concealment is needed, then the illicit passion is its own Nemesis, then nothing were ever drearier, wearier, more anxious, or more fatiguing than its devious paths become, and they seem to hold the sated wanderer in a labyrinth of which he knows, and knowing hates, every wind, and curve, and coil, yet out of which it seems to him he will never make his way back again into the light of wholesome day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THAT same night that the Lady Joan drew her yellow skirts through the ballroom crowds, and drew her lover behind it, to the admiration and approbation of all who beheld her, a sledge, furiously driven, was crossing one of the vast level tracks of Russia in the teeth of a storm of snow and wind.

For hour after hour there was no break in the wide white track save when, at some wretched group of hovels or some small walled hamlet, the steaming and half-frantic horses were changed. The frozen plains stretched all around, dotted here and there by the black stems of stunted pines. The snow fell ceaselessly. Now and then

through the roar of the wind there came as the wind lulled for a moment the sound of a wolf-pack baying afar off. The sledge went on, the horses tore their way through drift and hurricane.

Every now and then a voice from within cried into the bitter air, 'Faster! faster! for the love of heaven!' The voice was feeble and feverish.

'We had better stop, Fedorivanovitch,' urged a stronger voice tenderly; but the other always answered, 'No, no—on! on!'

And the voice was obeyed, for it had the sound of death in it.

The road was lost sight of; all tracks were obliterated; even the burning oil in the lamps was frozen; the snow fell always. The horses were urged onwards in the dark, for the night was black, though the world was white. Verst upon verst was covered of that horrible, silent highway. The baying of wolves was heard nearer. The wind whirled the falling snow round and round in endless gyrations. It was a night when men die like frozen sheep.

Still the feeble voice within cried always, 'No, no—on! on!' and it was obeyed. The glimmer of dull lights at length grew near, and showed where one more posting station was.

'It is time,' muttered the driver, for he knew that in another half-hour his good beasts would fall to rise no more. He flogged them onward towards that faint light; the snow ceased for a little while to fall; the bay of the pack behind them grew distant once more.

'The Father be praised!' said the driver as he pulled his horses up half-dead before the cluster of miserable dwellings.

It was in the middle of the night, but there were people awake. The postmaster came out with a lantern into the cold, which was enough to freeze every living thing. Through the open door, from which the snow was cleared, the light of a lamp streamed. A servant got down from the sleigh.

'Hold the light here,' he said, with an ashen face.

'Is he worse?' said the driver, leaving his quivering beasts for a moment. The man snatched

the lantern and held it so that he could see into the interior of the tarantass.

'Dear God!' he cried, with a great shout.

Then, trembling with another tremor than that of cold, he tore away the furs and wraps. The post people saw the form of a young man. The head was sunk upon the breast; from the breast blood had oozed out over the costly furs and frozen there.

'He has but swooned, he has but swooned!' the people cried. The driver added, 'Only half an hour ago he was crying to me to go faster.'

'The night is death!' cried the servant, beside himself. 'It is Fedorivanovitch Souroff. Help me carry him within—quick! quick! quick!'

A dozen stout arms aided him to lift his master from the sleigh. He was quite a young man, of singular beauty, and he wore the uniform of the Cuirassiers of the Guard; his face was without colour, his lips scarcely breathed; blood still oozed from his chest and froze as the outer air reached it.

'His wound has broken out afresh!' cried the servant, and wept as children weep.

They carried his master within the posting-house and laid him down on the skins and rugs of his sledge on the floor by the warmth of the stove.

It was a poor, miserable place; but the people were kind from pity and sorrow, not merely from respect for the sword, and for a great noble's name. Women were crying; they brewed hot tea quickly; they prayed to their saints; they did what they knew.

'But on such a night to be out,' they cried, 'with a wound! it is death.'

'It is death,' said his servant. 'But he was in such haste to reach Petersburg he would have no delay. What can we do—what can we do? Is there a surgeon?'

There was none nearer than at a town they named lying many versts away.

The officer meanwhile was dying. He had never moved since they had laid him there upon the black bearskins from his sleigh; his head had fallen back, his eyes were closed; the drops

of tea they tried to force through his teeth only wetted his lips; they had torn his linen open and his shirt, but they could not staunch the blood. It flowed sluggishly, feebly, but it flowed always, and looked dark and clotted. It came from the lungs.

He had been wounded, by a spear, six weeks before, in the chest.

The people stood round him appalled, silent, helpless; the women sobbed; his servant kneeled beside him. Without, the snow fell and the winds howled and the wolves. The dull yellow rays of the lamp fell on the pallid and delicate beauty of his face.

Suddenly his eyes opened wide, he stretched his arms out, he gazed with heartsick yearning into the circle of strange faces that were about his deathbed.

'Dorotea!' he cried aloud, and his hands felt the empty air feebly as for some beloved thing they sought to touch.

'Dorotea!' he cried once more.

Then he fell back exhausted; the blood gushed with a quicker current from his breast;

he sighed once — wearily — and then was dead.

. . . . .

'That is the name of the woman he loved,' said the soldier that was both his servant and his foster-brother. 'I have a written packet to take to her, his cross for his mother, his sword for the Tzar. It is a singing woman that he loved. Perhaps she is singing now, and he lies dead.'

. . . . .

She was singing—in the *Romeo and Giulietta* of Gounod, in the Opera House of St. Petersburg. It was a great night, by Imperial command. The Court was present in all its brilliancy, and not even the presence of the Tzar could restrain the delirium of the overflowing house. Never before, so they vowed, had the beauty of Dorotea Coronis been so great or her marvellous voice so divine. In her white robes, in the balcony scene, with the diamonds in her hair and on her breast, her supreme loveliness vanquished even the magic of her voice. She was so beautiful that for some moments the

volleys of applause welcomed only her beauty, and would not let her voice be heard. They adored the scene, and forgot the singer. She was the rival of herself.

Then, when at last silence came and let her voice be heard, that seemed like a lark's to lose itself in the very heights of heaven, the hushed and breathless crowds forgot her beauty and believed that they listened to the angels.

She had had many a night of triumph; many a night when great theatres had rung with the thunders of a people's homage, and a multitude beside itself with rapture had thrust her horses from the shafts and drawn her to her home. But no night had perhaps ever equalled this one.

When the opera was ended Imperial gifts were brought to her in the choicest shapes that jewels could be found to take, and crowns and wreaths and clusters of flowers, all holding some gem of price, covered her dressing-chamber with their costly lumber.

When she left the Opera House the whole city seemed in commotion. It was a white city, for

it was still midwinter; but a million lights sparkled everywhere above the snow. A brilliant guard was escorting the Imperial carriages; there was a guard also for herself—a volunteer guard of many of the highest gentlemen of the land, bearing torches and shouting *vivats* in her honour. They ran with her to her house, a brilliant medley of fantastic figures, wrapped in furs and waving torches. The thunder of their plaudits rang up to the clear steel-hued sky of the North, where the stars were shining, so intense in their brilliancy that they seemed to pierce the frozen air with spears of light. Across one-half the heavens, also, there was outspread in all its wonder the rose-red rays and golden flames of the aurora borealis.

'Oh, the night of nights!' cried in ecstasy the old Spanish woman who had never left her since she first had sung in Seville.

Dorotea Coronis did not answer; she sat before her mirror, with her hands listlessly clasped, weary and silent. What was triumph to her? A story stale and without power to charm. What use were all the voices of earth adoring her? She

only longed to hear one that was never now upon her ear.

'Oh, my love, my love! oh, my soul!' she had said in her heart all the while that the flood of song had poured from her lips, and she had seen nothing of the great throngs that listened to her, nothing of the deluge of light and the sea of faces; she had only seen in memory the eyes of Fédor.

A great supper waited for her, where princes were the hosts, in a very bower of camellias and roses that gold had made bloom whilst the Neva was ice and the whole land was snow; but she sent word that she was unwell, and sat alone in her chamber, disrobed, with her loose hair hanging over her, whilst the aurora burned in the midnight skies, and the old Spaniard, crouching in the threshold, told her beads.

There was a little open casket before her; there were letters in it—nothing but letters, and one lock of a man's fine fair hair.

She read all the letters one by one from first to last, as she had read them a thousand times. The first were a mere few formal lines of such

courtesy as strangers pay; the others, eloquent utterances of an absorbing passion, now alive with hope, now desolate with despair; the last, words that made light of a spear-wound received in a mountain skirmish, and that burned with a love that made all physical pain indifferent, nay, unfelt.

'You call me cold,' she thought as she read. 'Oh, my love! oh, my soul! you do not know. What were the world's scorn, the world's shame to *me*—the vile world that harbours the prostitute and the pander in its high places, and hugs a lie and all that speak one? The world! that stones innocence like a poor dog called mad, and kisses the clay foot of any gilded sin! What were the world to me? Think you I would not welcome the worst that it could do to me to buy one hour with you? But, my love, my soul, I want to save you from myself. Oh, God! give me strength to be strong, to "be cold," to bear your reproach, to bear your pain! Mother of Christ, give me strength to keep you free—it is for you—for you—for you!'

Then she warmed the letters in her breast

as if they were the pale cheeks of some little ailing child, and clasped them to her, and rocked herself to and fro wearily, as one whose burden was greater than her force.

The door of her chamber unclosed without the sound reaching her ear; with a noiseless step her husband entered and approached her, seeing in the mirror before her the letters clasped to her bosom, the white grief of her bowed face, the great tears that stole one by one from under her closed eyelids.

He stretched his hand over her shoulder and, with a clutch as chill and hard as though his hand was in a glove of steel, he grasped the letters that lay in her bare breast.

Then the Duc de Santorin smiled.

'We have wanted these a long time, my lawyers and I,' he said slowly. 'You will have no more like them, madame. Your lover is dead!'

CHAPTER XXVII.

Ioris awoke very weary in the morning.

He had slept but little, and that feverishly

The shrill shrieks, and yells, and whooping cries of the maskers scare sleep from all eyes on the last nights of Carnival in Rome.

With sunrise the maskers had gone to their homes, worn out with noisy riot and rapture, the sun came tenderly in through the orange boughs by his casement; some robins were singing on the window-sill; but he awoke feverish and depressed, and turned from the waking smile of the day.

'N'es-tu pas mien,
Ah! Je vois que tu m'aimes bien,
Tu rougis quand je te regarde,'

he murmured, as he closed his eyes against the light, as the old words of the poet, dead nearly three centuries ago, drifted through his misty thoughts. It was not the woman whose yellow skirts he had followed through the close crowds of the ball-room that recalled these tender old words to his memory as he awoke.

Then he remembered with a shudder that it was Fat Tuesday, last day of carnival, last night of masquerade.

His friend loved the roar and the riot of carnival; she was at the height of her happiness, throned in a break, disguised, and with wire vizor, flinging the showers of chalk over the crowd, and sustaining the duel of the sweetmeats with the balconies. There was a robust vigour of insatiable enjoyment in her throughout the mad pranks of those headlong frolics, which once had attracted, which now disgusted him. She herself paid little heed whether he were disgusted or attracted; he was hers, as much as the live bird tied to her bouquet.

She donned her wire mask and her costume, Turkish, Chinese, Moyen-âge, or what not, and

amused herself with that zest in the masquerade which made her as boisterous and gleeful as any lad of fifteen summers. The noisy, dusty, riotous, shrieking pandemonium was paradise to her, and woe betide him if he had not his carriage ready at her door, with its steeds pranked out in fooling guise and its cushions laden with confetti and flowers.

He rose to this weary duty with a sigh. In days of boyhood he had loved well enough the merriment and graceful mummeries of carnival, which then had been full of a colour and a light which have now passed for ever away from the carnival as from the world; now, it seemed to him, both he and the world had grown grave and fatigued, and could never any more shake their joy-bells without effort.

Lady Joan did not care what he felt or did not feel; she sent him word to mind and be ready at three o'clock.

He bade his servant see that the break and the horses were ready, and then went out of the house to the house of Etoile.

She was so used to see him there by noonday

that she only looked up with a smile as he entered, and went on with a study she was painting.

He looked at it quickly: it was his own portrait.

'Go in the light, yonder,' she said to him, without answering his glad rapid words of surprise. 'I made this study from memory; I want to finish it. I shall call it Hamlet.'

'Hamlet! And why?'

'Because you are very like Hamlet; you will never be sure of what you wish——'

'I am only too sure of what I wish,' said Ioris, almost inaudibly, and his eyes dwelt on her with a sombre passion in them that, like a magnetism, drew up her own regard to his.

She looked a moment, then shuddered a little, and grew pale.

He kissed her left hand as it hung by her side, and kept it in his own.

In the silence they could hear the beating of each other's hearts.

The servant threw open the door, and they started as if they were guilty. He left her side

quickly, and went and stood by the hearth. An old German musician had entered, a little feeble old man, unknown to fame, but who had all the music of his country at his fingers' ends, and in his heart and soul.

'You bade me bring you the Passion Musik of the sublime Bach,' he said, with the humble fond look at her as of a dog to the only creature kind to him. The old man knew, heard, saw nothing but his music.

With a timid salutation to Ioris, whom he did not know, he shambled to the grand piano standing in the shadow, and ran his hands over it and began to play unbidden. The solemn, tender, mystic melodies filled the room with their power.

She motioned to Ioris to stay where he was, and continued her painting. The light fell on his delicate features, thoughtful and mysterious, like the heads of Bronzino's and the old Florentine painters' portraits; the odours of the jonquils and hyacinths were in the air, sweet and tranquil as peace; the music stole softly from the distant shadows, where the musician

played on unseen, unwitting of the flight of time.

Ioris was unhappy, yet content; unquiet, yet lulled to a dreamy repose. Etoile was very pale, and her hand, as it moved, had lost its firm, unerring mastery, and trembled ever so little. Yet, when their eyes met across the sunlight and the heads of the flowers, they were both happy.

They did not need words; the music was the fittest interpreter of both their hearts.

Two o'clock rang from the bells without.

Both started to think that time had flown thus by them unnoted. They had scarcely spoken, yet the hour was, perhaps, the sweetest of both their lives and the purest of his. Never afterwards could one of them, at least, hear the music of those themes without the hot tears rushing to her eyes, and that short sweet serene hour returning to her like 'remembered kisses after death.'

Two o'clock rang, and struck from clock, and bells, and Princess Vera sent a message begging that she would not forget to come to her balcony in an hour's time.

'The Corso!' said Etoile, in impatience, and turned the wet panel with his portrait on it to the wall.

The Corso!

Ioris remembered his tyrant.

'I, too, must go to the Corso,' he said, with a restless sigh.

She did not ask with whom; she did not even look at him. He took his leave whilst the old German still played on through the sad intricate melodies of Schumann and Chopin.

He went out of her presence serener, happier, with the melodies about him like the very breath of religion, and the fragrance of the flowers seeming to follow him in symbol of a pure soul opened to his gaze and touch.

He went, and drove the horses to the Casa Challoner; and down the stairs came his mistress, masked, and with a spangled domino. Behind her were Guido Serravalle as a trovatore, with his guitar, and Douglas Græme as a Louis Treize mousquetaire, and all with tin shovels in their hands to bespatter the crowd with their chalk.

'You look as dull as a grave digger, Io.

Why didn't you dress up in something?' said the Lady Joan, as she tossed him a mask on her doorstep; she gave a piercing carnival yell, and jumped into the break; young Guido strummed his guitar, Mimo ran up puffing and breathless, fat and absurd, clad as a Condottière, and banging the step with his sword; the Count di Sestri, stately and elegant, dressed as Cesare Borgia in azure and white, came also.

'En route!' cried the Lady Joan, with rapture, and they rolled away, soon mixed with the jostling press of carriages and cars, maskers and mummers, under the white clouds of the flying chalk.

Ioris, all the dreary hours through, looked up at the brilliant balcony of the Princess Vera, but he did not see Etoile there. He was glad.

The Corso over, ending with its fairy war of the Moccoletti, till a sea of fire sparkled from the Porta del Popolo to the Reprisa dei Barberi, they went to dinner in a private room at Spillmann's, a very gay, noisy, and costly dinner, that lasted long, and thence, at midnight, the Lady Joan slipping into a black domino instead

of a spangled one, as a snake slips its skin, passed to the Veglione.

He was not relieved from his attendance on her until four o'clock on the following morning, when, tired for once, and hoarse from screaming in falsetto through her mask, she consented to leave the crowded foyer and go home.

Ioris did not go home. He walked about the quiet streets in the clear crisp air, as the grey in the sky showed the breaking day, and went far out of his way to pass the old palace on the Montecavallo.

'She has been asleep all these hours,' he thought, and looked up at the dark grated casements which shut in the sleep of Etoile.

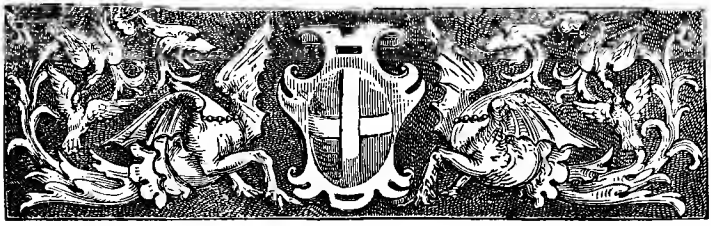
How horrible it seemed to him that a woman could grin and scream and riot through the day and night, and give and take the veiled indecencies and salacious jests of that masked motley mob of the masquerade at the Apollo!

Some gardeners were entering the Colonna gardens. He entered with them, and dropped down on the bench where he had found Etoile sitting a few days before.

Day was breaking over the vastness of Rome, outspread in its greyness and calm beneath.

He looked at it till the tears rose in his eyes and dimmed his sight, as the light of dawn trembled over the city.

'Oh, the things that I dreamt in my youth!' he thought: and his heart was sick; for he felt that his youth and his dreams might all have resurrection, but at the gates of the grave where they were buried a dread shape stood, and barred the way; and the spectre was the ghost of a dead passion.



CHAPTER XXVIII.

MEANWHILE Mr. Challoner, who was a virtuous man and did not go to masked balls, and was a wise man and let no spectres rise to him, was having a cup of tea comfortably in bed; after that he had a cold bath, the morning papers, an interview with his little girl and the governess, and then proceeded at a leisurely pace through the streets, across the water, to a certain grim old mansion in the centre of the Trastevere, and towards one of the many doors that opened on its grimy wide staircase of stone, a door that had been made out of keeping with its surroundings by modern additions of plate glass and brass plates, and bore on it in conspicuous letters:—

'Società Italiana-Inglese del Ponte Calabrese-Siciliano,' and had underneath this inscription :—'Bureau della Direzione.'

When Mr. Challoner had mounted the grimy staircase and had passed the modernised door, he was generally very happy, even happier than when with his little girl and her governess.

To begin with, he was a director, a thing which he always liked being. The word director had an important, responsible, pompous kind of sound that was balm to him; he had been a singularly unlucky man, but the word director always blinded him to this fact—it has a successful sound about it; in spite of the innumerable bubbles and awful earthquakes that it too often heralds, the word director always sounds like wealth and public esteem. But sweeter, even than for this, was his office desk to Mr. Challoner, because it symbolised all his substitutes for that more vulgar vengeance which ignorant men wondered he had never taken on Ioris.

Ioris was wearied and impatient of this speculation into which he had been beguiled.

Things were going wrong; all these dreary

and complicated troubles into which he had been drawn were each day knitting themselves tighter and more intricately.

Mr. Challoner had a knack of making things go wrong quite unintentionally: on the banks of Orontes and Euphrates they had gone so wrong that hundreds and thousands and even millions of pounds, and the whole name and fame of a very fine business, had tumbled into those historic rivers and been seen no more.

'*A mauvais jeu bonne mine*,' said Mr. Challoner, and the more unfortunate he was, the more imperturbably did he set his unchangeable countenance in a stern and blank repose, off which it was impossible for anybody to take any diagnosis of any of his feelings, and begin to play again with shares for his cards, and the round world for his roulette wheel. It was in a very small way indeed, but it was as sweet to him as if he had been a Rothschild. His wife enjoyed selling a cracked tea-cup, and he enjoyed floating an obscure company. He had not succeeded in anything, and in all probability never would, but that did not interfere with his enjoyment.

If he had gone out in a wintry dawn, and shot at Ioris, it would have been uncomfortable and unsatisfactory: even if he had seen Ioris lying dead on the turf it would not have pleased him particularly; he was a slow-blooded and humane person; but to see the money of Ioris dropped down into bottomless abysses of speculation, and the honour of Ioris imperilled in hastily and ignorantly assumed responsibilities, did please him a little in a sluggish sort of way, and made him smile when he was safely shut up alone, examining Ioris's signatures, in the Bureau of the Messina Bridge. It was a vengeance much more appropriate to his era than the shot in the wintry dawn would have been.

Mr. Challoner was essentially a man of his time. He could pocket all affronts, and conceal all resentments; he could turn pompous placid phrases when his veins were turning cold in wrath; he could enter a drawing-room behind his wife and Ioris, and endure imperturbably the smile of the drawing-room crowd; but he was human, nevertheless, and when he saw the fortunes of his wife's friend dropping—dropping—

dropping into the Sicilian sands and seas, he smiled. Mr. Challoner knew by experience that curses may come home again, but money never does. Mr. Challoner would sit at his desk in this large and ancient palace that held the Messina offices, and count up columns of figures, and feel content—so content that when his wife would call for him in the twilight, as she did sometimes, he would say quite good-humouredly, and he was not a good-humoured man—'And Ioris—is Ioris with you, my love?'

Yet in this, the fourth season of its commercial existence, the bridge at the Straits of Messina could not be said to be a success; indeed, it had stopped short at its very commencement. The piles were there in the sand for anybody who liked to look at them, but they could not be said to advance traffic, and they did not satisfy the shareholders.

It costs a good deal of money to drive piles into sand, and a good many millions of francs were driven in with them, and the crabs ran in and out the piles, and the waves washed them, but there was no bridge to be seen in the soft

ambient air spanning the waters. To be sure there was always the bridge upon paper, in the clearest and most colossal designs that could delight the soul of any engineer; and the engineers said that the piles in the sand were all that could be reasonably expected from the number of years and the number of millions. But everybody is not an engineer to understand this, and the shareholders were not satisfied; indeed, whenever are shareholders satisfied?

If you give them ten per cent. and a bonus, they are frightened: they think you are going too fast; if you give them nothing at all, and make them pay up, they are equally frightened, and rush and sell out and ruin you and themselves.

There are only the swine at Gadara that ever could equal shareholders in silliness, so the Lady Joan said; but she was not herself very angry when the shares of the Messina Bridge dropped from zenith to zero; she was quite good-tempered about it; she was only a promoter, not a shareholder, and sensibly said that you cannot expect colossal works to be rattled off in a day.

Into the sand and the sea, with the piles, however, had gone a good deal of money, not of hers. 'I'm too poor to put money in; I can only give 'em my brains,' she always said pleasantly in all affairs of the kind. But Ioris *had* put his money in, allured by those fair white parchment designs with all the engineers' lines and dots and figures; and when he went down to the Gulf of Faro, and looked over the blue serene sea where the bridge should have been, and was not, his heart sank as lead would have sunk in the sea. And his heart smote him too, thinking of those shareholders whom in all innocence and good faith he had so unhappily helped to mislead; and he could not laugh when the Lady Joan called them his Gadarene swine.

Mr. Challoner did smile, as far as the rigidity of his countenance could ever be said to do so.

He had been a shepherd of the sheep that were silly as swine, and had been well-paid to be a shepherd, and could sit at his handsome desk in the old palace where the bureau was, serenely and without responsibility.

It was only Ioris that was responsible.

The bridge by the Gulf of Faro was one of those doomed enterprises which open like a blaze of fireworks on a king's birthday, and in a little while leave but some charred sticks and some burnt fingers to the darkness of the night. Its fate was written, and its name was ruin.

Even if ever it were to get built, no commerce could ever for centuries to come be enough to repay its gigantic cost. And it never would get built: the seas and the winds forbade it.

'Who ever said it would be built?' cried Lady Joan, in irritation, at the simplicity of Ioris when he was surprised and pained at this. 'Who ever said it would be built? We proposed to try and build it. That is quite another thing.'

When he did not see the difference, she told him he was a fool. To propose is lucrative: to build is not so.

Ioris, whose imagination had been taken captive with brilliant fancies of reviving the old commerce between Africa and Italy, of opening up the old highways of the seas and bringing within easy reach the vast untouched riches of

the great isles, Ioris was inconsolable, and full of bitter anxieties as the months and the years slipped by and brought no nearer the realisation of those splendid schemes that had glittered so brilliantly on paper and parchment.

He saw no return for his money nor for that of all the tens of thousands of shareholders embarked in it. He saw continual expenditure: that was all. The public history of the bridge of Faro was like the private history of the land at Fiordelisa.

Meantime, to Mr. Challoner both the public and the private history were matters of grim and tranquil diversion.

'Wrath is a terrible impiety, quite an impiety,' said Mr. Challoner, furling his umbrella in the offices that afternoon when his day's labours were done, for on his road thither that morning, meeting an acquaintance in the street, he had heard with regret that Baron Chemnitz and the Marquis Cardello had met in a fatal encounter on the dreary lands of a Flemish frontier town, and that Cardello was dead, and his adversary dying. Mr. Challoner, furling his umbrella, felt

a compassion tinged with contempt for both the combatants.

What good did dying do?

Mr. Challoner looked at Ioris's signatures lying on his desk, and having made his umbrella quite smooth, went out into the street again contentedly.

'So the Baron has killed Cardello, and is shot through the lungs himself?' said another acquaintance that he met, and then stopped embarrassed, fearing Mr. Challoner might have some fellow-feeling; but Mr. Challoner had none.

He was very sorry for both, he said, very; and more sorry still for Society.

And he undid the beautifully-neat umbrella as a few drops fell from the clouds, and went onwards. All the world was talking of the tragedy that had closed the great Chemnitz scandal in the darkness of death.

Mr. Challoner pursued his tranquil way home to the Temple of All the Virtues, and as the sounds of his wife's guitar struck on his ear, put his umbrella in the rack, and looked at the sables of Ioris hanging on the coat-stand of the anteroom,

then he shook his head and smiled grimly. He shook his head for Baron Chemnitz, he smiled for himself.

On the other side of the oriental silk curtains his wife and Ioris were speaking of the tragedy.

'Alas! that poor woman!' said Ioris, absently, thinking of the lost and lonely creature for whose sake these men had perished.

Lady Joan, who was tired after the masking of the day and night, struck a chord of her *chitarra* and laughed, as she lay full length on her sofa.

'How could she be such a fool!'

Mr. Challoner entered the room and went up to the sofa, staring hard through his eyeglasses, not seeing, or not willing to see, the heavy frown on his wife's brows.

'There is bad news from the Straits, Ioris,' he said without preface, and began to extract letters, papers, and telegraphic despatches from his pocket.

The face of Ioris, pale and weary already, grew paler.

Mr. Challoner thought of Baron Chemnitz lying dying with the air whistling through his pierced lungs, thought of him certainly with regret and pity, because he had been so great a headstone of the commercial world; but still with contempt—the contempt of a superior person.

'*Very* bad news,' he said with a sigh. 'I fear we shall lose;—well, I dare not say how much we shall lose—read these letters.'

Now, 'we' was a figure of speech; the vague, metaphorical, much-beloved pronoun hourly in use at the Casa Challoner and at Fiordelisa; a mere figure of speech, because though Mr. Challoner was a shepherd, the gold of Ioris had gathered together this flock that was more silly than the Gadarene swine.

Ioris stretched his hand for the letters—his dark cheek grew very white; but the Lady Joan snatched, before he could touch, them.

'Oh, bother! What do you come pulling a long face for, Robert? The letters will keep till to-morrow. Bad news always keeps and never evaporates—worse luck! Of course everything's

going wrong, you wouldn't listen to *me* either of you.'

And she read the letters disdainfully, tossing a page here and there to Ioris. She was not very anxious herself—the concession had been got ages ago, and had been taken discreetly and advantageously to the English market, where everybody that knows anything takes their golden eggs at all times to be hatched; nothing could undo the fact of the concession, or take away its profits. As for the sheep that were silly as the Gadarene swine, if they liked to run down the slope, let 'em.

That was the Lady Joan's opinion.

The letters were indeed of very ominous import; Mr. Challoner had not exaggerated, he never did exaggerate—he was a very exact man.

All the letters were bad, and could scarcely have been worse; they told of riotous work-people clamouring for wages, of labour at a standstill for want of funds, of ill-conducted tides that sucked under every bit of timber or stone deposited near them, of many millions that had produced nothing except some rotten piles, con-

venient resting-place for barnacles; and finally, very disagreeable hints that shareholders were dissatisfied and clamoured, and began to talk of a commission of inquiry.

Ioris's changeful face altered from its pallor to an angry and nervous flush.

'But it is abominable!' he said, rising in an indignant surprise and pain. Why should they write in that manner? They can surely know that I have done my best. Is not my own money gone in the sand and the sea with theirs? I do not comprehend. Would they insult me?'

'Nobody talks of insult in business, Io,' said the Lady Joan, drily. 'In business you pocket your fine feelings. Don't look like that. What does it matter? They are a set of idiots.'

'I do not understand,' said Ioris, unheeding, crushing in his hand one of the letters he had read. 'Can any man give better guarantee of his good faith than to risk all he has? You said it was an enterprise that was good; all these men said it was good. I have done my best; I have imperilled myself; I will pay those labourers that cry for their wages out of my own means single

handed; if I am penniless to-morrow I will pay them all. Yes, to-day. But how is it my fault? Can I govern the waters? Can I say to the sea, Peace? Could I tell that the sands would sink and the storms arise? They have no patience, those people, and no pity.'

He was strongly agitated; his face had grown very white again and the nerves of his brow were swollen. He paced up and down the room. He did not understand.

Mr. Challoner leaned back in his chair, and trimmed his nails thoughtfully. He liked being a shepherd, and knew that he would probably have to cease being a shepherd, if those silly flocks screamed so loudly; yet he enjoyed the moment.

He felt more compassionate contempt than ever for Baron Chemnitz, who could think of nothing better than those uncomfortable and discreditable pistol shots in a field in Flanders.

Lady Joan picked up the crumpled letter and smoothed it.

'Don't look so awfully put out, Io,' she said, with a rough effort at consolation. 'It'll all come

right, and don't for Heaven's sake talk of going paying the navvies and shipwrights yourself. You always will come to grief in business, because you always will bring such fine sentiments into it with you. Remember the china pot that would go swimming down stream with the iron pots—that's you to the life——'

'I shall pay them,' said Ioris, between his teeth.

In all these bitter and angry letters nothing had stung him so much as the statement that the foreign workmen on the Gulf of Faro were clamouring against the direction for their unpaid wages.

'Oh, Heavens! what a fool you are!' she cried with utter impatience. 'You've no more right or need to pay them than the Duke of Oban! Do you think because his name's on the prospectus, *he*'ll go and empty his pockets for all those yelling brutes? The works are at a stand-still for a little time for want of funds; the men must take the rough with the smooth, the fat with the lean; they know that well enough. They can't complain; let 'em look to the contractors

who brought 'em over to the work! We're not the contractors.'

'I shall pay them,' said Ioris. 'I shall pay them as long as I can, if I sell Fiordelisa.'

'Sell Fiordelisa!'

She sprang erect on to her feet. No tigress bereft of her young ever darted into more vivid fury, more instantaneous ferocity of attack and defence.

'Sell Fiordelisa!' was he mad? was she? was the world in its orbit? were the heavens shining around and above? Sell Fiordelisa!

Mr. Challoner, having pared the remaining nail on his little finger with scrupulous attention, lifted his eyes and saw his wife transformed, her eyes blazing, her lips quivering, her head flung back, her voice ringing shrill as a clarion, her breath hissing fierce as a storm wind.

'My love, you forget yourself,' said Mr. Challoner, with dignity, draping his toga and adjusting his countenance, though no one was there to behold it. 'You forget yourself, Joan. If our friend wish to part with his estate, what is it to us?'

And Mr. Challoner having said this solemnly, only to relieve his conscience, for neither of his companions heard a syllable that he said, picked up the fallen letters, and went to his own small study.

He always withdrew from a scene.

From the study, though afar off, he still heard the echo of his wife's furious voice, as when shut in a mountain cavern you hear the roll of the storm in the valley.

Mr. Challoner lit a comfortable pipe of oriental tobacco, and unfolded his *Pall Mall Gazette.*

'She will end with hysterics,' he thought, and looked at his watch. It still wanted three hours of dinner-time. The hysterics would have time to come and pass away before the hour should strike at which they were to go and dine with Lord and Lady Norwich—a fish dinner for Ash Wednesday, at which his wife would wear a different mask to the wire one of the Corso and the satin one of the Apollo.

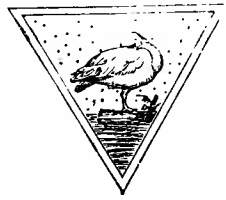
Mr. Challoner smoked on serenely.

He felt regret, as he smoked, that Baron Chemnitz, a pillar of the temple of commerce, had not

been able to think of anything better than those pistols in the damp Flemish field.

He threw fuel on his stove and slipped his feet in slippers.

From the distant apartment there still came dully through the closed doors the furious echo of his wife's outcries. Mr. Challoner felt how thoroughly well Lucretius had understood human nature when he had penned that now hackneyed statement about the placid enjoyment of a tem pest when one is safely housed oneself.



CHAPTER XXIX.

A FEW nights later there was a dinner at the Casa Challoner, to which Etoile had been engaged three weeks before, that she might meet some expected friends of absent Lord Archie's. He had begged them to see her, and had written to his daughter to that effect. They were called Denysons of Kingsclere, people passing but a few days in Rome, learned, agreeable, and high-bred, who loved art and Lord Archie, and from the latter cause visited at the Casa Challoner, and for the former reason laughed very much at its artistic pretensions.

When the evening came, Etoile felt reluctant to go ; she got into her dress listlessly and hesi-

tated as to whether she would not send word she was too fatigued and unwell; it would have been partially true; a feverish depression weighed on her, and seemed to undo all the good the calm and mild winter had done her.

'You have been staying out of doors too much at sunset,' said her friends; but she felt guilty as they said it; it was not the sunset; it was rather that the trouble of another's life was entering her own, and the agitation and unreality of it were moving her own, which had so long been serenely fixed in the deep tranquillities and truths of art. From the moment that another life has any empire on ours, peace is gone.

Art spreads around us a profound and noble repose, but passion enters it and then art grows restless and troubled, as the deep sea at the call of the whirlwind.

'I will not go,' she said to herself; she felt to shudder from the touch of the hand which locked the fetters of Ioris on him.

She leaned against the grating of her great casement, watching that sunset which is so oft maligned as the cause of those fevers that men

and women's follies, faults, and indiscretions, bring upon themselves. It was burning beyond the dark lines of Monte Mario across the city; she could see the radiance through the bars; the rosy warmth fell across the wide square and made the pavement flush till it looked like porphyry. The piazza was empty, except for a brown-frocked monk and a little child dragging a quantity of arbute boughs, doomed to the dyers, and cut down ere spring came. She watched the sunset and did not see Ioris passing from the palace until he was beneath the casement; it was not his nearest way home from the Quirinal, but he made it so very often. He uncovered his head and looked up with a smile; the window was not much above him. He had been to see her early that morning.

'Are you dressed already?' he said, in a little alarm. 'Am I so late then?'

'My clock was fast; yes, I am dressed, but —if it were not rude, I would so willingly not go. I was thinking of excusing myself even now.'

A quick fear leapt into his eyes.

'Oh, do not do that! she would never forgive it.'

'Do you think I care either for what she forgives or revenges!'

Etoile spoke with a sudden petulance new to her, leaning against the iron grating of the great embrasure.

'No, no,' he murmured, 'of course not; but she is a bitter foe, it is not worth while. Come, pray come, for my sake!'

Her eyes softened at the last words.

'It is for that I would stay away,' she said, a little impetuously. 'I mean—speaking to me as you do of her—it is not possible to feel at ease either with myself or her.'

'We must all wear masks in the world,' said Ioris, with a little smile and a brilliant joy lighting his uplifted eyes, for her words had said to him more than she thought lay in them.

'I have never worn one,' she said, quickly. 'Where I could not feel frank friendship, or at least honest indifference, I have never gone; it makes me ashamed, remembering all that you

and I have said, to take her hand, to sit at her table. If she knew, what would she say?'

A flush, that was not from the sunset, passed over his face.

'I will never ask you to do it again. But this once pray come—for my sake!'

He raised himself on the stone coping of the wall and passed his hand inside the grating and touched hers.

'I will not go if you do not,' he said wilfully. 'Promise me.'

'This once—no more.'

'No more then. Give me a rose to wear in my coat—just one.'

She smiled, and broke a half-blown rose off the plants in the *jardinière* and passed it through the bars to him—a creamy tea-scented Niphetos.

He kissed her fingers, and then the rose, uncovered his head once more and went on quickly across the brightness of the square.

She remained motionless, leaning against the casement.

A sense of oppression and of want of frank-

ness and of faith weighed on her. Her creeds were not of the world.

When she passed up the stairs of the Casa Challoner she felt cold, though the night was warm. The Turkish room was full when she entered, but all she saw in the blaze of lights was the face of Ioris; he had a Niphetos rose in his coat.

He came forward, when all others had saluted her, with his grave ceremonious grace of greeting. '*Très-honoré de vous voir, Comtesse. La santé va bien?*'

'How distant he is with her,' thought his hostess, with glee. 'Marjory must make a mistake. I am sure he never sees her—except here.'

The dinner passed off well.

For the first time Etoile saw Lady Joan in her court-mantle of stiff and irreproachable propriety. The Denysons of Kingsclere were not people to be trifled with; and though they had had the bad taste to wish to meet a Parisian artist, and had discomfited her a good deal by bringing that request from her father, still they were persons so irreproachably placed and so highly

cultured, that she dared play no antics with them. She had asked some fashionable Russians and some aristocratic Italians to meet them, had a Monsignore, and a very learned German Professor; had put on the Genoa velvet, Irish point, and English propriety, set Ioris far away from herself at table, and discoursed with seriousness, decorousness, and amiability.

Etoile sat near her, and, herself very silent, listened and watched the scene, set and rehearsed, for the Denysons of Kingsclere.

Every word seemed to her as if it should bring down some such swift judgment of heaven as smote Ananias and Sapphira's lie. She, who knew the truth, seemed to look down into this woman's soul, and see all its shifts and sophistries, all its nakedness and meanness, until her own heart grew sick. Her own cheeks grew hot with shame, her own eyes grew dark with scorn; she was absent, and scarcely heard what was said to herself; she was thinking all the while, 'Oh, well may the world be sick, since all its food is falsehood!'

And on the other side, far down across the

lights and the flowers and the glass, she saw the Niphetos rose in Ioris's breast.

'Your Muse is a very silent one,' said Sir Walter Denyson to his hostess, having watched Etoile some time.

'She would talk if Io were near her,' said Lady Joan, with a short laugh.

'Does she favour your friend then?'

'I believe so, but he's only bored by it at present. Perhaps he will be entangled later on; he is rather weak, you know,' said his hostess in a whisper, with another laugh.

Sir Walter, who knew his friend Archie's daughter pretty well, was mystified, and said afterwards to his wife, that he did not fancy Joan cared much about that good-looking Italian, though she did live in his house; she did not seem to think much of him.

The dinner over and the guests gathered once more in the Turkish room, which looked very pretty with flowers in the old blue and white bowls, and coffee served in little jewel-like Persian cups, Lady Joan went to the piano, and her watch-dog came in in time to accompany her. It

was not a night for the guitar; the guitar in all its forms, viol, lyre, chitarra, or mandoline, is a melodious and romantic instrument, suggestive of love-trysts and moonlight; the piano is an unpleasant piece of mechanism, invented to spoil the human voice, and domestic and respectable in proportion to its unpleasantness. On propriety nights, Lady Joan always sang to the piano.

Ioris, at the moment that his hostess was singing, passed across the chamber to where Etoile was resting on one of the divans.

'What beautiful lace, Madame; point d'Argenton, is it not?' he said, touching the lace of her dress; then added very low:

'How can I thank you for coming! but you seem out of spirits, grave, constrained. What is it?'

'I feel treacherous and untrue!' murmured Etoile wearily, all the scorn and pain she felt glancing for one instant from her eyes to his.

'It is not *you* that are so,' he said, with a sad tenderness. 'But you are quite right. This is no atmosphere for you. I will not ask you to come again——'

'No. I will never come again.'

And she kept her word.

'What a charming fan!' said Ioris, for the benefit of Sir Walter, who was hovering near, longing to approach her, and Ioris took the fan and talked of its epoch, Louis Seize, and of fan-painters, and of the *genre rocaille*, on all of which he could speak with judgment, knowledge, and that infinite grace which characterised the least thing that he did or said, and Sir Walter, watching his occasion, joined in the conversation, and found the Muse still silent.

When Etoile left, which was early, Ioris could not take her to her carriage, for the host himself performed that office; but Ioris, giving her back her fan, found means to murmur in her ear:—

'I shall go away with the others, the night is over for me; I have my talisman with me—my rose.'

'*Coquin!* you play the police for your wife!' he muttered between his teeth, as standing above in the vestibule he watched the form of Mr. Challoner pass down the staircase; and his

heart beat angrily within him under the Niphetos rose.

'Io! come here!' cried the Lady Joan, as he returned to her Turkish room. 'Here is Sir Walter raving with jealousy of you; he says Etoile would hardly look at him, she seems so much in love with you.'

'But, indeed, I never——' began Sir Walter, in protest.

'Monsieur, I am not so happy,' said Ioris, with his coldest smile and airiest grace. 'No Muse will stoop to earth for me, and as for the tender passions—*je suis un homme mort!*'

'You do not look it,' said Sir Walter, with a smile.

Lady Joan frowned heavily.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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